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—D. J. R.

AVON  
SCIENCE-FICTION  
READER

No. 1

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# The War of the Sexes

by Edmond Hamilton

*Many a person has spoken in favor of the war between the sexes. Webster has produced some of his famous orations on that subject, the inability of the male to comprehend the female and vice versa. Nobody can fail to notice the ways by which each sex tries to remove the other, an endeavor which extends throughout every nation—there, there, another, and so on. There have been contests in various places—wherever there are isolated lands still lonely—where there exists an actual hostility between the sexes, where for instance women maintain secret codes and languages, far separated from the consciousness of men. To this day, modern American girls maintain lodges from whose portals women are barred and whose affairs are conducted with rules and ceremonies as women may desire to have. There is therefore nothing at all improbable about Edmond Hamilton's creating story of a period twenty thousand years from now. Nothing impossible we repeat, but we certainly hope that it will always remain as from improbable.*

**I**S THIS the residence of Doctor Duriel Lantin?" asked Allan Rand of the tall, bearded man with penetrating eyes who had answered his ring.  
"I am Doctor Lantin," the other said him. "You wish to see me?"  
"About your advertisement," Allan said. "My name's Allan Rand—you ad asked for a young man without connections in search of exciting work, and I thought I might fit the bill."

"Please come inside," Doctor Lantin invited. "My laboratory is in the back of the house—this way."

Allan Rand, inside, went with the other down a narrow hall that opened into a square, white-tiled room. It was windowless, but a great lamp glowed at the center of the ceiling. There was a desk in the corner and on it a photograph that caught Allan's eye—a picture of a vivacious young girl.

Under the ceiling lamp stood a table and beside it were racks of diving instruments and complicated apparatus with rubber tubing that looked like anaesthetic apparatus. Around the walls were shelves of chemicals and jars holding odd specimens of animal life.

"I am a research biologist," Doctor Lantin explained, "and I want a young man with cold steel nerve and a strong body to accompany me on a scientific expedition I am making soon to the South American jungles."

"I don't know about the nerve," Allan Rand grunted, "but I think my body's strong enough."

"I can soon ascertain whether that is so," said Doctor Lassus. "Will you please stretch out on this table for examination?"

Allan Rand climbed onto the metal table and stretched out. Doctor Lassus bent over him and then came a metallic click, and another. Allan felt with the sound of the clicks that something had fastened shut on his wrists and ankles. He strove to sit up and found that he had been fastened to the table with metal clamps.

"What's the meaning of that?" he demanded indignantly. "You ain't never me to this table for an examination!"

"The examination was only a ruse, Mr. Rand," said Dr. Lassus coolly, "and the advertisement also."

"What is this, then—a holding-up?" asked Allan Rand.

"In a sense," smiled the doctor. "Only I am going to take from you, not your money, but your brain."

At Allan's blank look his smile deepened. "For a long time I have believed that a brain severed from a living body could be kept living indefinitely in the proper serum, just as a chicken heart has been kept living in serum.

"Of course no one would volunteer willingly to have his brain severed for such an experiment. There was nothing for it but to use an unwilling subject, to hire some one here to be the subject. I invented my advertisement, and it brought you to me."

A cold sweat broke upon Allan Rand's forehead at Doctor Lassus's words. The man spoke as dispassionately as of the vivisection of a rat.

"But that's murder!" Allan cried. "You can't do such a thing without it being found out!"

"Murder is quite justified when it is committed in the interest of science," Lassus told him coolly. "As to discovery, you have no connections to worry about you and will not be missed. I assure you I am quite capable of disposing of your body once I have the brain out of it."

With the words Doctor Lassus pulled toward him the neck of surgical instruments and the anesthetic apparatus with its rubber tubing and cone. He then brought a container of thick, clear liquid. Allan Rand saw and strained at his letters.

"You can't do this thing!" he cried. "Lassus, it's crazy—to try to keep my brain living in a jar of serum!"

Doctor Lassus had the rubber anesthetic-cone in his hand. "It may be I'll not succeed," he admitted, "but I think I will. In any case you'll never know, Rand, for even if your brain does live on in the serum it'll be unconscious."

"A whiff of this anesthetic now," he smiled, "and it will all be over for Allan Rand. Any last words before you go into the darkness?"

He was pressing the cone on Allan Rand's nostrils as he spoke and Allan felt the numbing scent overcoming his consciousness. Darkness indeed was gathering swiftly around him but out of that darkness he struggled with a last defiance to answer Lassus's mocking question.

"Last words? My last words are to—go ahead and—be damned to—"

Complete darkness and unconsciousness encompassed Allan Rand.

He was aware of the return of consciousness, his first sensation a jolting

pain in his head. He groaned, stirred, and then was aware that he was lying on a soft surface that that of the table on which he had last consciousness. He heard a murmur of voices, and opened his eyes.

Two men were bending over him and for a moment Allan lay motionless looking up at them. The men were middle-aged, and both were clad in soft blue silk-like jackets and blue, close-fitting long-knigh trousers. They wore belts with clasps of white metal, and in a sheath at each belt was a flat white metal rod. One of the men was a head taller and broader-shouldered than the other. Both had intelligent features.

Allan Rand stared wonderingly up at them, and then the smaller of the two men spoke. His words were in English, but an English that seemed distorted and strangely accented, so changed in fact that it was only with difficulty that he understood.

"He lives, Kraan! The scientists have succeeded—he lives!" the man was exclaiming.

"Yes, he is living!" conceded the bigger man, Kraan. "Never thought I to have seen it, Dural."

Allan Rand struggled to speak, and when he did so, he found that his voice sounded strange, unnatural. "What's all this about?" he asked weakly. "Where am I?"

Rememberance came to him suddenly, and with anger. "Where's Doctor Lantin? I remember now—by heaven, Lantin's going to account to me for this!"

"You are angry with some one, lord?" asked Dural.

"Yes, with the bird who was going to remove my brain—who trapped me in this laboratory!" Allan Rand said. "When I find him I'll——"

He sat up as he said that, and then the words died on his lips in sheer amazement as he looked around. He was not in Doctor Lantin's laboratory. He was in a strange room such as he had never seen before.

The walls were of blue as brilliant as though the room had been hollowed from a gigantic sapphire, the sunlight that shone through windows in one wall reflected back and forth in shimmering azure lightnings. Just beneath the windows stood the padded metal table on which Allan sat.

He saw that besides Kraan and Dural there were three others in the room, clad in blue silky jackets and trousers also. These three stood respectfully beside squat, complicated-looking apparatuses of metal and glass. There were also metal instruments like the surgical instruments of Doctor Lantin, and a square container of thick clear liquid. The three blue-garbed men beside these instruments returned Allan's stare respectfully.

Allan turned to the two men beside him, Kraan and Dural, then with a sudden thought turned still further to look from the windows behind the table on which he sat. He looked, felt his mind racing at what he saw. Far outside there stretched in the sunlight not the buildings of the city in which Doctor Lantin's house had stood, but a different and unearthly-looking city.

A city of blue buildings! Cubical buildings they were, mostly, but their size differed, ranging from small cubes of two or three stories to huge ones

whose roofs were like glistening blue plains. This multitude of turquoise cubes extended to the horizon.

The streets between them, even, were like, thronged with acrobatic figures. Tapering white aircraft flashed in and out above the city so swiftly that they were white streaks in the vanishing. Allan was aware as he looked forth that the building from whose window he stared was perhaps the largest in the city, an enormous blue cube surrounded by a plaza on which a crowd was gathered.

Allan turned from the window toward the two men beside him. "What's this place?" he asked directly. "And Laran—where's Laran?"

"You mean the man you saw last?" Dural asked. "He has been dead for twenty thousand years."

"What?" yelled Allan Rand. "What kind of joke is this? Or have I lost my sanity?"

"Lord, you are still sane," Dural reassured him. "But since the man you call Laran made you unconscious, more than twenty thousand years have rolled across earth."

"Twenty thousand years—it's impossible!" Allan cried. "You can't tell me that I could have lived through all that time, that my body could have been preserved!"

"Your body was not preserved," Dural said, "but your brain was! Twenty thousand years ago your brain was taken from your body by a scientist, and placed in serum. In that serum your brain lived on long after the scientist himself was dead."

"Other scientists, though, cared for the serum containing your brain, generation after generation of them. In that way for two hundred centuries your brain has lived without consciousness in the serum. And now that it has been put back into a body and restored thus to consciousness, you seem to yourself to have just awoken."

"It can't be true!" Allan insisted, cold fear at his heart. "Why, even if my brain was preserved in that way, my body couldn't have been used to put my brain back in!"

"I did not say that your brain had been put back into your body," Dural answered pointedly. "I said it had been put back into a body."

At the full import of his words struck Allan, he looked down at himself for the first time.

He saw that he was clad in blue trousers and jacket like those of the others. But his strong, hard legs—his massive torso—his long, steady fingers and superbly muscled arms and shoulders—these were not of the body that had been Allan Rand's!

He was handed a mirror, and as he stared into it, it almost dropped from his hands. The face that looked back at him from the mirror was no more Allan Rand's than the body—it was a high, aquiline, merciless face with rubies black eyes and a straight mouth. The unfamiliar face was topped by close-cut dark hair.

Allan let the mirror fall. "Good God, whose body is this that you've put my brain into?" he exclaimed. "Who am I?"

Durdil bowed as he answered. "Lord, you are Thus, ruler of the Males." "Ruler of the Males?" Allan repeated. "What do you mean?"

"Lord, great changes have taken place on earth while your brain slept in the serum. In your day the two sexes, Males and Females, mingled. But for eight thousand years now they have been distinctly separate races, deadly enemies of each other."

"Do you mean to say that a war of sexes has been going on for eight thousand years?" Allan demanded.

Durdil and Krang bowed affirmation.

"But how has the human race propagated itself, then?" Allan asked.

"I will explain," said Durdil. "Until ten thousand years ago men and women lived as in your time, marrying and producing children cared for by their immediate parents. Then a woman biologist achieved ectogenesis, the production of children in the laboratory directly from the human gamete-cells or seed cells.

"By treating the gamete cells with a secret agent she had evolved, she could fertilize them artificially and produce tiny embryos which, in an artificial environment equivalent to the placental arrangement of the human mother's body, grew into normal children.

"This woman biologist found she could produce children of whichever sex she wished, by controlling the number of chromosomes in the gamete-cells used. She chose to produce only female children, and she and the women disciples she gathered around her engaged in the large-scale production of females.

"The females would soon have outnumbered the males and dominated them had not a man biologist discovered the secret of ectogenesis also. He and his male associates determined to restore the balance of numbers and began producing male children on a large scale.

"Swiftly rivalry grew between the two sexes as to which should be dominant in numbers. Ancestral love so great that co-operation between males and females fell off. Marriage and the concepts of marriage and love declined until they had entirely disappeared.

"The children of the world were produced entirely by ectogenesis. The female scientists controlled the laboratories in which female children were produced, and the male scientists those in which male children were produced. Each sex produced as many children as possible, still hoping to outnumber and dominate the other sex.

"Sex riots broke out in the cities, males fighting females in the streets. Finally the two sexes separated, becoming two separate races, Males and Females. The rest of earth was gradually deserted as the two races settled wholly in this continent. The Males took the cities in the north, of which this city is capital, while the Females took the cities in the south, several hundred miles from here."

"Soon came open war between Males and Females, the Males going south in their flyers and with their fire-rods raining death on the women's cities, and the Females retaliating. That war has gone on ever since. In war as in

peace, the Males have a single ruler, as do also the Females, and you, Thur, are that ruler."

"But I still don't see how it is that I'm Thur," Allan persisted. "Why did you put my brain in Thur's body?"

"For this reason," Durul said. "Thur has been our ruler for ten years and his strong rule alone has held up the Male morale against the constant attacks the Females have been lately making on us. But this morning in landing his flying on the roof of this palace, Thur was killed, part of his skull being crushed in on his brain.

"Kraan and I, who are Thur's chief counsellors, knew that over the Males learned their strong ruler was dead they would lose all courage. We asked the scientists if in some way they could not revive Thur. They said that as only his brain was damaged, putting a new living brain in his skull at once would reanimate Thur's body.

"There was no time to take out the brain of one of us to put in Thur's skull—every second was precious if Thur's body was to be reanimated. But the scientists said they had in their collections a brain kept living in serum for generations as a scientific curiosity. That could be used, they said, and we agreed.

"So the brain living in the serum, your brain, was brought and rapidly installed in Thur's skull, nerve-connections made, the broken parts of the skull fused. Then, when a little time had passed, your brain woke to consciousness in Thur's body. And now, lord, you are Thur, ruler of the Males, and their resistance against the attacks which Bera, the Female ruler, and her henchmen, Breela and Dubis, have been making on us. You must help the Males withstand them or Thur has died."

Allan Randal—dreadful that he were Thur's body he could think of himself only as Alfred Rand—was stunned. "And I'm Thur! What a sort of troubles Kraan shot me into—a war of sexes, and the ruler of the Males!"

"Tell me, Durul," he said. "Isn't there a chance at stopping this war, of making peace between the Males and Females?"

Durul shook his head, and so did the big Kraan. "There is no chance," Kraan affirmed. "The Females will not stop their attacks on us until they have wiped out all Males and only Females live on earth."

"And one sex?" Durul added. "is the same to vanquish and destroy the Females so that the future will see Males only in the world?"

"And a free world it would be in either case!" said Allan drily. "All men in the all-women—one world!"

"And now, lord Thur," said Durul, "will you not show yourself to the Male crowds outside? Rumors have been spreading all day that Thur's dead, and they need but no excuse to be reassured."

Allan hesitated. "All right," he said. "Since I've got Thur's body I suppose I'll have to live up to some of his responsibilities."

With the help of Durul and Kraan he slid from the padded table. He tried his legs experimentally. He could walk and move as easily as he had ever done with his own body, he found.

Suddenly Allan wondered what had become of his own body. Destroyed

by Doctor Lantin, twenty thousand years ago, he supposed. He felt a bittersweet homesickness for that familiar body, a strangeness in inhabiting this of Thar's. But Thar's body now was his—he must make the best of it.

Dural informed him that it was Thar's custom to show himself to his people from a terrace on the palace roof, and Allan acquiesced. Dural and Kranu walked with him out of the blue chamber into a turquoise-walled corridor. Along it stood guard with flat metal fan-rods, standing there in silence as Allan—or Thar—passed.

They went through the blue hallways until they reached a shining white star that wound both upward and downward. They were up this and soon emerged onto the roof of the palace, so vast in extent that it seemed like a great glistening blue plain. Many of the white flyers were parked in regular rows on the roof.

There was a balcony jutting out at one side of the roof, and Dural and Kranu led Allan out onto this. He looked down there from a great height upon the huge crowds of blue-clad figures that jammed the plaza below. The people, the Males!

And they were all Males. There were youths and even small boys among them, but not one woman.

He appeared on the terrace, and a tremendous shout of joy went up from the Male crowds as they looked up and saw Allan—or Thar.

Their shout was dying when abruptly it welled up again in a great cry that was different in tone, a crescendo of surprise and fear. The crowd below was not looking now at Allan but up beyond him, pointing excitedly.

Allan looked quickly up with Kranu and Dural, and saw a swarm of white flyers diving headlong onto the Male city from high above.

"A Female raid!" yelled Kranu. "They'll be turning their fan rods on us in a moment!"

"Back inside, lord Thar!" cried Dural, but Allan was held motionless by the weird sight.

From the Female flyers, as they swooped plummet-like upon the city, came flurrying feathers, thin cut streaks of scorching death across the crowds of running Males below.

The Males were not running for shelter though, but toward their own flyers. Already dozens of Male flyers were swooping up to meet the Female craft.

The whole city had become a scene of wild uproar. The Female flyers formed a great spiraling robbing circle, the individuals circling down to loose firebombs and then swooping upward again so those behind them met their place. From roofs across the city the Males roared with fire bombs as their own flyers took to the air.

Kranu was running toward one of the parked flyers on the roof. Allan sprang with him to the craft.

"No, go not, Thar!" cried Dural, clutching to hold him. "You, the ruler, must not risk yourself in this battle—"

"Hell of a ruler I'd be if I was afraid to fight with the rest!" Allan flung at him. "I never dodged a scrap yet—let her go, Kranu!"

He had crouched behind Kraan on the flat deck of the swooping flyer. Kraan grasped its control wheel, shoved a lever with his elbow, and as a mechanism under the flat deck began to hum, the flyer shot sharply upward from the road.

Kraan half turned to yell to Allan, "The stern fire rods, lord Thor—the triggers loose the fire flashes!"

There were fire rods mounted on swivels at prow and stern, and Allan grasped the stern ones, his fingers closing on the triggers Kraan had indicated. "I've got them—go ahead!" he cried.

Kraan headed the flyer straight toward the marksmen-like center of the battle. The big Male kept one hand on the control-wheel and the other on the trigger of the prow fire-rod.

They rushed through the air, then were in the thick of the combat—Male and Female flyers darting, burking, diving all around them. Fire-flashes burned thick from flyer to flyer and each of either side fell in flames as they were struck.

Allan could glimpse the Females as green-clad figures easily distinguishable thus from the blue-garbed Males. Fire flashes scorched close past him as Kraan maneuvered the flyer sharply. Two Female flyers were diving on them from above.

Allan swung the stern fire-rods up toward the down-rushing craft, his fingers tense on the triggers. For a split-second he saw clearly the faces of the Females on the diving craft—girl's faces, eyes steady as they worked their own fire rods.

Good Lord, he couldn't fire on girl! The thought held Allan's fingers motionless on the triggers and almost caused his death, for in a second the girls on the down-rushing Female flyers loosed their bars together. Only another lightning swerve by Kraan evaded them.

Quick as thought Kraan pulled back and worked his own fire-rod at the two Females close before they could regain height. Kraan at least had no compunction in firing on the Females—Allan saw the two flyers reel down in flames, hit. Kraan drove up again into the cluster of the fight.

But now the combat was scattering. Allan saw that the Female flyers were withdrawing, massing together and heading southward. Their own raid finished they were retreating, pursued by the Male flyers that had risen to repel them.

One Female flyer flew above the mass of the rest as though directing the retreat. Kraan drove headlong toward her. Instantly he was engaged in a single combat with it, the rest of the Female flyers continuing their flight pursued by the Males.

Kraan dipped, circled, climbed, in aerial combat with the Female flyer, Allan, clinging to the deck, saw that on the Female craft were two green-clad girls, one working the fire rods and the other piloting the flyer.

The fire-bars of the Female craft almost got home, but Kraan evaded them, achieved the advantage in height. Instantly his prow fire-rod spat a burst at the enemy flyer. It struck the Female pilot, destroyed her, and the craft reeled pilotless down toward the city.

Kraan dived after it. Allan saw the remaining Female on the falling flyer struggling to reach its controls.

She had just done so, was levelling out the flyer in its downward plunge, when it crashed shattering along the city's street.

Kraan landed close beside it. The Female on the wrecked flyer leapt from it, a small hand fire-rod in her grasp.

But Kraan and Allan were too quick for her. They seized her before she could use the weapon. She struggled, and Allan was amazed at the wilder strength in this girl's lithe, slender body.

But Males in the crowd were running to the scene, helped to hold the Female. Allan, panting, stepped back. He saw now that the girl wore jacket and short tunic of green.

Her black hair was close-trimmed and uncoiffed. Her dark eyes were flaming with wrath and her breath rising and falling as she stood in the grasp of her Male captors.

Through the gathering crowd of Males pushed a group of guards and with them came Dural, his anxious face seeking Allan.

"Lord Thar, you're not hurt?" he cried.

"No, thanks to Kraan," Allan said. "And Kraan and I seem to have taken a captive."

Dural turned his gaze on the girl. His eyes widened as he looked at her. "Do you know who this Female is?" he cried.

Allan and Kraan shook their heads. "It's Nara, ruler of the Females!" Dural cried. "You've captured the Female ruler!"

"Nara!" shouted Kraan. A shout went up from the Males around. "Nara captured!"

The girl spoke, her eyes deadly in their hate. "Yes, Nara, you dogs of Males! And sorry I am that I could not kill more of you before this happened to me."

"You'll have the guards kill her at once, Thar?" Dural asked.

"Kill her?" Allan repeated.

"Of course—we Males kill all Females we capture and so do they any of us they take prisoner. I will give the order to the guards."

Dural turned to do so but Allan's voice halted him. "Don't do it! You can't kill this girl like that!"

Dural and Kraan stared at him in sheer astonishment. "Why not? She is a Female—a deadly enemy of all our race."

"Yes, and will be while I live!" exulted Nara. "I ask for no mercy from you, Thar."

Shouts went up from the Males around. "Death to Nara! Kill the Female!"

Allan asserted himself. "I am Thar, am I not?" he said coldly to Dural and Kraan and the gathered Males. "It is my order that instead of killing the Female you imprison her securely."

For a moment Allan thought that Dural and Kraan would rebel at the order. But they did not.

"You are the lord Thar," said Dural bowing. "The order will be obeyed."

He gave a brief order to the Male guards, who led Nara, a thin, defunct figure, toward the great palace of Thar in which Allan had awakened.

Allan looked up and saw that the sky over the city was now full of Male flyers returning from their pursuit of the Female flyers. The Male city was alive with excitement.

"The Females got away?" Allan asked, and Dural nodded.

"Most of them did, but many of them we destroyed. And they lost their ruler—this has been a disastrous raid for the Females."

With Krahn and Dural, Allan walked back into the palace of Thar. As they entered it a guard reported to Allan.

"We have placed Nara in one of the cells in the lowest level of the palace, under guard, Lord Thar," he informed.

"All right, keep her there for the present," Allan said. "I'll decide what's to be done with her."

But by the time night came Allan had made no progress toward a decision. He sat with Krahn and Dural at a little table set upon the terrace that jutted from the palace's end. He had eaten with the two Males a supper of synthetic foods of jelly-like consistency, strange but not unpleasant to the taste.

Now he sat looking out. Night lay over the Male city, whose buildings were outlined by the lights that blazed here and there in an irregular pattern. Swift hummimg shapes came and went in the darkness overhead, patrols of Male flyers on the alert against another Female attack.

"But it will be some time before the Females raid again," said Dural with satisfaction. "Yes, down in the Female cities, Bruda and Dulon and the rest of the Females will be sad tonight thinking of their ruler Nara's capture."

"And will beadder when they hear that we've killed Nara," added Krahn, with a sidelong glance at Allan.

"Why not you so set on killing this Nara?" Allan asked. "Why do all you Males feel that you have to destroy every Female?"

"Lord Thar, had your best friends been killed by Females you'd have as much hate for them as we do," said Dural solemnly.

"And the Females feel the same way about the Males," Allan commented. "And you because this damned ice war started it'll be fought until one or the other of the sexes is wiped out."

"That is what we Males are fighting for—to rid the world of the Females!" said Dural fervently. "And to kill Nara will be a step in that direction—she has been one of the ablest Female rulers."

"There is in fact nothing you can do but kill her, Lord Thar," Krahn pointed out. "You can not keep her prisoner forever and you cannot let her go back to the Females to make new raids on us."

"Well, I'll decide what's to be done with her," Allan said. "I wish I had the man who shot me ahead into this world, into another man's body and responsibilities and into this crazy war of sexes."

When Dural and Krahn had gone from the terrace, Allan sat on, looking out over the night-shrouded Male city and brooding further on the strange situation into which Lester's mad experiment had projected him. What a

world it was into which he had awakened so strangely! A topey-dopey world, a loveless world in which the sexes had become the bitterest of enemies.

Allan remembered how back in his own time, even, there had been signs of this. The emergence of women from their age-old subjection to the other sex had stirred up no small amount of sex jealousy. Rivalry of men and women had grown in many cases to antagonism and open enmity. And now that the mating of men and women was no longer necessary for the perpetuation of the race, the two sexes had come to open war and fought, each to wipe out the other.

And if one sex was, destroying the other completely, what would the world be then? A world in which only men or only women existed, a sexless world as devoid of color and warmth as that of some insects. A world in which all the violent emotional contact and upon that had formerly fertilized the earth were done away with, a cold, gray, loveless and sexless world!

Allan stood up suddenly. That vision appalled him—yet what could he do? What must he do? His thoughts swung as the girl captured that day, this Nara who was the Female ruler as he, Thair, was ruler of the Males. Could he, he wondered, get Nara to help him end this senseless war of men and women? Remembering the girl's ferocity, he doubted it. But it was worth trying.

He strode to the door and passed down it to the lowest level of the palace, guards stationed on the soft-lit landings saluting him with their big rods as he passed. There he saw a corridor stretching away, dimly lit, with barred doors along its walls. Two guards stood in it. They saluted as Allan approached.

"In which cell is the Female, Nara, prisoner?" Allan asked.

One of the guards pointed to a door. "In that one, lord Thair."

"You have the key to it?" Allan asked. "Give it to me—I will speak with Nara."

"Shall we attend you, lord Thair?" the guard asked as he handed the key. "The Female is fierce, and we can go with you."

"To protect me from a girl?" Allan smiled. "No, I can take care of myself. Remain here."

He went down the corridor to the metal-barred door the guard had indicated, and stopped outside it, looking into the soft light cell.

Nara sat on a metal bunk, her slim, green-clad figure gallantly erect as she gazed out the cell's tiny single window.

As Allan inserted his key and entered the cell, Nara turned quickly. She recognised him and at once her eyes blazed defiance, her little body tense as that of some wrathful young tiger.

"Well, lord Thair, was capturing me not enough?" she asked bitterly. "Must you come to gloat over me too?"

"I'm not here to gloat," Allan Rand told her. "I'm sorry for you, Nara."

"Sorry for me?" Nara hissed the words in fury. "I know how sorry you are, you Male dog! You have done more than any other Male to wipe out the Females!"

"That's what I came to talk about," Allan said. "You see, I wouldn't want to see the Males wipe out the Females at all."

"You wouldn't—" Nara looked at him incredulously. "Do you expect me to believe that?"

"With you?" said Allan. "I think it would be rather a dippy world with nothing but men in it, don't you? Or nothing but women?"

"You can not deceive me, That!" the girl exclaimed. "I know that for years you have been the worst enemy of the Females."

Allan pondered. "Suppose I told you that I wasn't really That at all?" he asked. "That I was really another man—a man from the far past—in That's body?"

"A man from the far past in That's body?" Nara's brow wrinkled. "I do not understand—but I do know that you are That."

"Well, let it pass," Allan said. "But even admitting that I'm That, you can put it this: I've had a change of mind, that I don't care any more to exterminate the Females."

"But why not?" The girl's anger was lost for the moment in sheer puzzlement. "Why shouldn't you want to kill all the Females?"

Allan laughed, his first whole-hearted laugh since his strange awakening. "Well, we men did sometimes feel back in my own time that we'd like to kill all the women. But most often we felt like knowing them."

"Knowing them?" Nara repeated. "You speak in riddles, That. What do you mean by knowing them—torturing them?"

"It wasn't exactly torture," Allan grunted. "It seems that kissing's been forgotten in all these war years, and no wonder. Well, I'll show you what I mean—"

His arms went around Nara's slim shoulders and drew her to him. For the moment Nara was too taken with surprise to struggle. Allan kissed her, her lips soft and fragrant against his own, her eyes staring unblinking into his.

Then suddenly she was struggling fiercely, quickly, with surprising strength. She flung Allan from her and backed against the cold wall, staring at him half in amazement, and half in wrath.

"Not bad, considering it's the first kiss the world has seen for eight thousand years," said Allan.

"And Males and Females did—that—back in the past?" Nara said unbelievingly.

"They sure did," Allan said. "And they weren't Males and Females then—but men and women who loved each other."

Nara's face was terrible. "The histories tell all of that—the savage times when Females degraded themselves by loving Males."

"What was savage about that?" Allan demanded. "I'd like to see things like that again, instead of this crazy war of yours you've fought so long."

"You'd like to see Males and Females make peace?" said Nara. "Yes you fought the Females today—took me captive—"

"I did no fighting really today," Allan Reed said, "nor did I mean to make a captive of you. As it was, I kept them from killing you."

"What good was that?" Nara asked. "Better a quick death than a lingering one here in this cell."

"But you're not going to stay here!" Allan exclaimed. "I'm going to let you go, if you'll help me in my efforts to make peace between the Males and Females."

"Let me go?" Nara said amazedly. "Even you, Thar, could not do that. Durul and the Males would never permit it."

"They won't know anything about it until it's done," Allan told her. "But if I do free you, Nara, will you help me to stop this war?"

Nara considered. "Certainly the war between Males and Females has gone on long," she said. "Though the Males started it——"

"No matter who started it, the thing to do now is to end it," Allan declared. "Will you help me do that?"

Nara hesitated, then suddenly nodded. "Yes, I will help you, Thar—will do all in my power to have the Females make peace."

"Good girl!" Allan's hand closed impatiently on her. He stood up. "If I get you up to the roof you can get away on one of the flyers."

Nara nodded quickly. "I can lead the Male patrols in the darkness without difficulty," she said.

"Then I'll get these two guards out of here and then we'll try it," Allan said. "Wait here."

He went out of the cell into the corridor and approached the two guards, who came to attention.

"You can return to your quarters," he told them. "There's no need for further watch here."

The guards looked surprised but saluted obediently. "The master will be obeyed, lord Thar," they said, and departed.

Allan waited until they were gone and then went back into the corridor. "All clear," he told Nara. "I think we can get to the roof without being seen."

They moved to the door and then he halted her, his hand on her arm.

"Are you sure, Nara, that I made quite clear to you what I wanted you, a little while ago?" Allan asked.

Nara nodded jerkily. "Your demonstration was quite clear, Thar."

"Nevertheless," Allan said unsmilingly, "I think I'd better demonstrate it again. I wouldn't want you going away with any hazy ideas on the subject——"

He drew her slim form close to him again for a moment, his lips again touching her, arms about the soft shoulders.

This time Nara did not struggle. It seemed to Allan, indeed, that she kissed him back, and she was white and a little trembling when he released her.

"We'd better get started, or I'll be keeping you here after all," said Allan a little unsmilingly. "Come on, Nara."

They went out into the corridor. "If we meet some of your people, Thar, what then?" Nara asked.

Allan shook his head. "They'd probably stop us, for all that I'm their

ruler; they hate you Females so. But we'll cross that bridge when we reach it and here's hoping we don't reach it."

They came to the winding white stair that led upward through the palace's levels to the roof. Quickly they climbed, Nara moving as rapidly as Allan could. They passed the landing at the first level, then that at the second, unobserved.

Up through level after level they followed the stair. At the sixth or seventh they stopped suddenly. They gripped Nala on the landing above.

They waited, Allan searching his brain for an expedient to pass the Males unobserved. He could guess that if he were found helping the Female ruler, Nara, to escape, not even the fact that he was Thar would excuse it. And it might well be that Dural and Keena then would tell the Males that he was *not* really Thar.

But as he paused with Nara in indecision the necessity of an expedient disappeared, the Males on the landing above vanishing as they moved off along the halls of that level. Allan hurried more easily, waited a few moments, and then with Nara's hand in his climbed rapidly up past that landing and past others until they emerged onto the roof.

In the darkness of night the roof was a dimly seen flat expanse on which the white shapes of the parked flyers glimmered. Overhead, buzzing craft came and went, Male patrols keeping watch in the darkness for possible Female attackers. The great city of the Males stretched in the distance, a plain of blinking lights.

Allan and Nara moved toward the nearest of the flyers. Nara clambered onto it, hastily examined its controls, then touched some of them and brought from the flyer's mechanism a deep horn.

As she crooked at the flyer's controls, Allan, standing on the roof beside her, leaned toward her.

"You can get past the Male patrols all right, Nara?" he asked, and she nodded.

"It will not be hard, for it will not be the first time that I've slipped between them."

"Then good luck, Nara, and remember that when you get back to the Female cause you must make every effort to get them to agree to peace. I will be doing the same with the Males here."

"I will do it, Thar," she promised. "And will—but look behind you!"

Allan whirled, expecting to see Male guards emerging onto the roof. But no one was there.

He turned quickly back to Nara. In the split second that he turned he saw Nara's arm raised above his head, one of the flyer's metal control-handles in her grasp. Then the blow descended on Allan's head, his brain seemed to explode in flame, and his senses forsake him.

Only slowly did Allan regain his senses. His first sensation was of a load dropping in his ears, and then he was aware that air was beating on his face. He tried to move and found he could not.

He opened his eyes and looked dazedly around. He was lying on the deck of one of the flyers, bound tightly to one of the stern fire-rods.

The Flyer was moving at high speed through hot sunlight. The sun, indeed, was several hours high and disclosed that the craft was flying over a great grassy plain. A girl's slim figure crouched at the controls in the Flyer's prow—it was Nara!

Allan remembered now—her setting Nara free, going with her to the paloof roof, and then her exclamation, her blow with the control handle. She had knocked him unconscious, then, and bound him to this gun!

Nara turned, and as she saw that Allan was awake a mocking smile crossed her face.

"Well, lord Thar, awake at last?" she said. "You slept long enough."

"Nara!" muttered Allan. "What does all this mean? You struck me down—bound me—"

Nara laughed, silvery and triumphant laughter. "I did, and I did more than that!" she exclaimed. "I got away in the darkness from the Male city with you, Thar, ruler of the Males, my prisoner!

"The sorrow of the Females for me, their captured ruler, will be changed to rejoicing soon. For not only did I do what no other Female has done, escape the Males when once captured by them, but I also bring the Male ruler with me as my captive!"

"Your captive?" Allan's dazed brain could not comprehend. "But you were going to have the Females make peace with the Males—you said so when I let you go—"

"And you believed me!" Nara mocked. "Surely, lord Thar, you have lost the trait that was yours in years past, when you could believe such an incredible thing as that I would make peace with the Males. No, Thar, you might have known that no matter what I said, neither I nor any Female could ever really want peace with those who have been for ages the most bitter enemies of our race."

"But I thought somehow you were different," Allan said, "that you could not hate the Males as When I knew you there—"

"When you did what you called knowing," said Nara contemptuously. "I suffered the indignity only because by so doing I was getting you to set me free."

"And you fooled me completely!" That fact beat strongest in Allan's mind. "Fooled me—well, I'll say that women haven't changed much after all in twenty thousand years. They can be as devious as well as ever. But what are you going to do with me when you do get me to the Female cities?" he asked. "I take it that I'm not going there just for the ride."

"You will be executed there, of course," said Nara. "Did you think the Females would let Thar, who has long been their worst enemy, continue as free?"

"I didn't and I don't want them to," said Allan bitterly. "I've had more than enough of this crazy damned world and I don't care about living any longer in it."

He sank back, his head throbbing with pain. Nara, at the controls, held the craft's flight steadily onward, southward.

Allan's thoughts were those. Overwelted, foiled, as completely as any

man back to his own time had ever been by some smooth tongued woman? The girl there at the prow had done it as well as though trained for it by a lifetime of association with men. All her female instinct of deception and betrayal had risen to help her, Allan thought.

He could see what a triumph it meant to her, not only to have fooled Thar, the great ruler of the Males, into letting her escape, but bringing Thar with her as a helpless prisoner. Allan could guess what the real Thar, the Thar whose body he was wearing, would think of such a happening, of how he would have reacted.

What difference did it make? he asked himself daily. He was better out of such a world, indeed, so far that Doctor Lester had prodded him into. It had repelled him in his first contact with it, this world where between men and women was nothing but remorseless ruthlessness, this loveless world with its mechanized production of children.

He had thought for a brief time that he had discovered something warm and human in it in his contact with Nara, her willingness to help him bring peace to Male and Female, her kisses—but he had awakened now to find Nara too a part of that fierce and loveless world, her softness only sham. Better for Allan to be out of such a world, indeed!

He closed his eyes. When he opened them again Nara was still guiding the flyer steadily southward.

The gray plain still extended in all directions without a break. There were no signs of human presence on it. Allan guessed that this was an uninhabited no-man's-land between the northern cities of the Males and the southern Female cities.

For hours they flew on over these uninhabited spaces, the sun swinging across the zenith and bringing an afternoon heat of increasing fierceness. There was no communication between them, though Nara came back to the flyer a stern at intervals and inspected Allan's bonds. She was taking no chances of his running the cables, he thought grimly.

He watched the girl from where he lay. Her slim, clean-lined body crouched at the controls, her keen, eager face beneath the dark hair—certainly there was something fine in her appearance, Allan admitted to himself. But he knew how deceptive this appearance was—all this eagerness of hers was to get him to the Female cities where, as the hated Thar, his short world be short.

They flew on, and after a time Nara turned to look back at Allan. "Tired of your bonds, lord Thar?" she said. "We will reach the chief city of my people soon."

"Where I'll be free of bonds and live both in short order," Allan said dryly.

Nara looked at him soberly, her masking triumph all but gone from her face. "Well, why not? Why should we Females be merciful to the great old enemy our race has had among the Males?"

Allan said no answer. Nara looked ahead again, but in a second turned back to him.

"Flyers ahead! They are Female patrols—we are near my city."

Dot, in the sky far ahead were all that Allan could see, but these rushed

rapidly closer and as they did so grew into white flyers moving in a scattered line.

These darted toward their own craft, circled and flew level with it. Nara stood up, making signals, and Allan heard exclamations of joy from the Females on the great flyers as they discerned their ruler.

The patrols stopped around the craft of Nara and Allan and sped on southward with it. Allan watched.

Soon he made out the outline of buildings at the skyline ahead. Tall, rectangular structures they were, a far-flung city much the same in outline as the city of the Males he had seen. But as he drew closer he saw that the buildings were not blue like the Male ones, but green.

Green was apparently as distinctive the Female color as blue the Male. The buildings might have been huge blocks of jade, the streets like rivers of molten emerald. All those Females whom he could see in the courts were clad in green like Nara.

Midway in the city rose a group of tall block-like buildings. Over these hovered and harried many flyers, part of the network of patrols that extended over the Female city in every direction. Toward these buildings the flyer of Nara and Allan, and its escort, sped, two of the patrol-flyers going ahead.

By the time the craft of Allan and Nara dipped down to land on the roof of the biggest building, the patrols that had gone ahead had brought a crowd of excited Females out onto the roof. In the midst of this crowd they landed. Nara stepped off the flyer, into the midst of the excited, gratulating girls and women.

They grasped her arms, shouting in joy, for the moment not noticing Allan's bound form. Two tall women came through the crowd to Nara, and from their air of authority Allan guessed them to be the lieutenants of Nara whom Daryl had mentioned, Breela and Dulan.

"Nara, you escaped them from the Males?" cried one of them.

"I did, Breela," said Nara. "And I brought one of the Males back with me."

She pointed to Allan. Breela and Dulan and the other Females on the roof stared at him a moment. Then a fierce roar went up.

"Thur!" cried Breela. "Thur himself—and you brought him back! The bitterest Male enemy we have ever had, in our power!"

"Kill him!" cried one of the Females wildly. "Death to Thur!"

"Yes, death to Thur it shall be!" Breela cried. "You'll have him executed at once, Nara?"

Nara looked at Allan. Allan smiled as he met her eyes, and she turned her gaze from him. "Not yet, Breela," she said. "Put him in one of the cells for the time being."

Breela's brown brows together, and from the Females on the roof came a murmur of disquietfaction.

"Why not execute him now?" Dulan demanded.

"Because"—Nara hesitated a moment, then went on—"because all the Females in the city should be here to see when their great enemy is killed."

Breila's brow cleared. "It is well thought of, Nara!" she said. "That is a spectacle no Female will want to miss."

"Put him in one of the cells now," she ordered a group of girl guards. "See that there is no possible chance of his escaping."

The guards did not unbind Allan but lifted his helpless form and carried him. As he was borne off he saw Nara led away by Breila and Dylan and the other excited Females.

The girls bore Allan down a fairway and through halls much like those that had been in the palace in the Male city, save that here the dominant motif of green was everywhere present. He was thrust into a small cell, his bonds removed while fire-rods covered him, and then the girl-guards retreated from the cell, locked its door, and took up their station outside.

Allan stretched his stiff, cramped limbs and rubbed his skin where the bonds had chafed it.

He looked about the cell and smiled mirthlessly. The situations were exactly reversed. It was he now who lay prisoner in Nara's palace.

Allan lay down, and despite the soreness of his muscles, soon slept heavily. He knew when he awoke that he had slumbered for some hours, and then saw that he had been awakened by the entry of some one into his cell.

It was Nara. She looked at him with an intensity of expression Allan could not fathom. The guards outside were now a little down the corridor, but Nara's fire rod was in her belt.

Allan asked, "Well, we seem to have changed places. Your turn now to do a little first-class gloating, Nara."

"I do not wish to gloat over you, Thar," Nara said soberly, "for you did not ever me."

"Too bad for me I didn't," said Allan bitterly. "I suppose they're making ready for the general festive attendant on my execution?"

"They will soon be ready," Nara said. "But I am not going to have you killed, Thar. I am going to let you go."

"You're what?" said Allan, stricken.

"I'm going to let you escape," Nara repeated. "You let me go, when I was in your power, I was wrong to take you captive then as I did, but I will send these guards away and get you out of the city before they kill you."

"And just why are you doing so?" Allan asked.

She looked at him doubtfully, uneasily. "Because you let me go, as I said. I am grateful for that, and—"

"It's only gratitude you feel then?" Allan asked.

Nara's eyes now were even more unusual. "What else could I feel, Thar?" Allan's arms for a third time grasped her, drew her unresistingly closer. "It couldn't be love you feel, Nara?"

Nara raised her eyes to his. "A Female could never love any Male. That," she whispered. "Yet——"

"Yet?" Allan prompted, his face close to hers.

"Yes I do love you!" she murmured. Their lips met—and then Allan flung Nara back against the cell's wall with all the bitterness that for hours had been growing in him.

"You do, do you?" he exclaimed. "Then you know now what it means to have some one you love deceive and betray you!"

Nara's face was dead white as she looked at him. Before she could speak, a woman's voice came from the door. "All is ready, Nara. Shall we take the prisoner up now?"

They turned. It was Breela who stood at the door, her face alight with exultation.

"Shall we take him up now?" Breela repeated. "All the city's Females are gathered around this building to see Thar die."

Nara nodded. "Yes, bring him now if all is ready."

She went out of the cell without meeting Allan's eyes. Breela called the guards, and these haled Allan from the cell, their fire rods constantly covering him. They marched him along the corridor, Nara and Breela going ahead.

Up the stair—Allan's thoughts were whirling—up past level after level until they emerged onto the roof.

Night had come while he slept in the cell. Allan saw, but the darkness over the Female city was dispelled on the roof by brilliant flares. The roof was packed with Females, and down in the wide streets around the building were tens of thousands more, all looking tensely upward.

As Allan looked around, he felt his heart beating faster despite himself. A queer way for him to end, a queer place—this world of twenty thousand years in the future into which Doctor Louis had flung him. Allan wondered miserably what Doral and Kraan and the rest of the Males would think by now of the disappearance of their ruler.

He saw Nara standing alone, her face still white, with Dylan and Breela and others of the Females. Breela gave an order.

In answer to it girl-guards marched Allan to the edge of the roof. He heard a tremendous roar from below as the Females in the streets glared their hated enemy. Thus.

The girl guards moved back from him and he was left alone at the roof's edge. He saw the girls raise their fire rods. Their faces were coldly contemptuous.

Allan turned his eyes toward Nara. She was looking steadily at him. Breela, beside her, leaned toward her. "It is for you to give the order to fire, Nara," she said.

"I am not going to give that order," said Nara clearly.

Breela frowned. "But one of us must! If Thar is to die, and you as ruler—"

"That is not going to die," Nara said. "I have decided."

An amazing babble of murmurings went up from the Females on the roof. Unbelieving were the faces turned toward Nara. Breela was staring at her ruler.

"Take Thar back down to the cell," Nara said. "It is my order."

The guards moved to obey, but Breela's outflung hand stopped them. "How you become traitress to your race, Nara?" she cried.

"I am ruler," Nara retorted, "and I say Thar dies not."

"And I tell you are no longer rulers of the Females when you try to save the life of the Females' worst lie!" Breela cried.

She turned to the Females on the road and those in the streets below.

"Stop, Females!" she shouted. "Does the Male Thor die now?"

"Kill Thor and the traitress Nara now!" they yelled furiously. "Death to Thor and Nara!"

"It shall be so!" Breela cried. "Guard, you have heard—execute Nara and place her beside Thor!"

A full moment the guard hesitated, then sprang toward Nara and grasped her. Unresistingly she let them drag her across the roof toward Allan.

As the girl guards went back across the roof, Allan caught Nara to him. She was sobbing.

"It is of no use, Thor," she said. "I tried to save you and could not."

"Nara, you've killed yourself trying to save me!" Allan cried. "You shouldn't have done it—I love you in spite of what I said a little while ago, and you shouldn't have done this."

"It does not matter," she said. "I would not want to live now with you dead, Thor. And this ends us together—"

Allan held her close, desperately. The yell of the furious Females on roof and streets were now like a single hateful bellowing voice in their ears. Across the roof Breela gave an order, and the girl guards again raised their deadly weapons.

Another moment would see the end for both of them, Allan knew. But before the first streak leapt from the rods, there was a sudden interruption. Down from the upper darkness of the night whose flesh on flesh of fire, marking across all the Females city!

"A Male attack!" yelled Dural, pointing to the flyers diving from above as they loosed their fire blades.

"It's Dural and Kranal!" Allan exclaimed. "They found you'd taken me, Nara, and have come after me!"

"Into the flyers!" Breela was crying. "Quick, before the Males destroy us all!"

Already Females were leaping into the flyers parked on roofs and gables and soaring up into the darkness to meet the fierce Male attack. Swiftly combat was joining above the city, Male and Female flyers diving and circling in the darkness, those struck by fire-blades crashing downward in bursts of flame.

Breela was running with other Females to the flyers, as were the guards who had been about to execute Allan and Nara. Allan saw that for the moment he and Nara were forgotten, and sudden hope flamed in him.

"Quick, Nara!" he cried. "If we can get away in a flyer now—!"

They ran to one of the newest ones, leapt onto it. Allan hurried franticly at its controls, Nara's hands guiding his. The flyer hurried, started steeply upward into the air—"

"Wait, look!" screamed Nara suddenly.

Allan glanced downward. On the roof they had just quitted Breela had

glanced their flight, had shouted a quick order to some of the Females. Then fire rods were already raised toward the flyer of Allan and Nara. The whole scene seemed frozen for a second.

In that second Allan knew that they could not evade the deadly fire flashes of those rods. He had just time to reach with his arms for Nara, to hold her tightly to him for an instant. Then as that instant passed, fire leapt from the rods below, fire arced to flame devastatingly through Allan's whole universe, and then was succeeded by unpenetrable blackness.

Blackness—blackness—could be awakening from death, the death the fire rods had sent him and Nara by itself herself. For he was waking, was conscious again of Nara's soft body held tightly in his arms as he had grasped it in that last instant. And then he heard Nara's voice.

"He's coming to, Dad! Look, how he groped me!"

Then a man's voice, chuckling, somehow familiar. "So I see! He can't be so unconscious when he does that."

Allan opened his eyes, then looked about him, bemuddled. He was lying down, still holding Nara tightly in his arms.

Nara it was, indeed, her clear eyes looking into his, her vivid face anxious, but a changed Nara—the were more not the green jacket and tunic but a drew strange and yet familiar to Allan's eyes, the dress of a girl of his own time twenty thousand years before.

He looked from Nara to the other figure bending over him, the man. He was tall, hunched, his eyes penetrating but having now an animal quality in them. Where had he seen those eyes before, Allan Rand asked himself, this man—

"Lantis?" Allan cried suddenly. "By heavens, Doctor Lantis!"

"None other," Lantis concurred. "But take it easy for a little while, Rand."

"But how did you get here to this time—" Allan Rand began, and then his jaw dropped as his eyes took in the room in which he lay.

It was that same laboratory of Doctor Lantis's in which he had lost consciousness when Lantis had been about to remove his brain!

He was lying on the same table, the same instruments beside it, on the desk in the corner the same photograph of a girl he had noticed on entering the room. But he recognized the girl in the photograph now—a girl beside him, was Nara!

"I'm back, then!" Allan whispered. "Back in my own time!"

"You ever time?" the girl asked. "What do you mean?"

"From the time you sent me into, twenty thousand years in the future," Allan explained to Lantis. "I woke there, my brain preserved and transplanted into another body—"

Lantis laughed hoarsely. "Nonsense!" he said. "You've been lying on this table unconscious for an hour, and that's all. I never did anything with your brain, though my threat to remove it apparently has given you a wild dream in the meantime."

"But it couldn't have been all dream!" Allan Rand protested. "I met Nara here as you—"

"My name isn't Nara—it's Janet Lampi," the girl told him.

"My daughter," Lavin nodded. "You saw her picture on the desk when you came into the laboratory and that's why her snipe permitted in your dream."

"All a dream!" Allan said dazedly. "But why did you do all this—tell me you were going to take out my brain, and put me under anesthesia?"

"Well," said Lavin, "I told you the exact truth when I said I wanted an assistant for my South American expedition who had strength and a cold-steel nerve. I could see you had the strength, and I used this stratagem to find out if you had the nerve.

"If you'd screamed or shamed or wept there when you thought I was about to deal out a horrible fate to you, I wouldn't have blamed you but I'd have known you weren't my man. But instead, even when you were passing under the anesthesia, you were defiant enough to tell me where to go.

"I meant only to give you a touch of the anesthetic, of course, but the darned thing got out of control for a minute and poor got a double portion. It was enough to keep poor asleep since then, and I was working to revive you when Janet came in. She heard me out for using such a method to test my assistant, and then helped me. You came back to consciousness and clutched Janet with a death grasp."

Allan was suddenly aware that he still held the girl in that tight clasp. He dropped his arm quickly.

She smiled at him—Shen's smile—and his heart warmed. "It was an unforgivable thing for Dad to do, Mr. Rand," she said, "but at least you get the position."

"I do?" said Allan. "You're not going on the expedition too by any chance, are you?"

She nodded. "Then I'm mighty glad to take the job," he said.

"But tell me," Janet said to Allan, "what did you mean when you told you were under another name in your dream?"

Allan reckoned. "I'll tell you later," he said. "I'd rather wait until we're a little better acquainted before I tell you how well we know each other."

# Green Glory

by Frank Bellamp Long

Many years ago Frank Bellamp Long wrote a series of stories of the extremely devout future stories which presented different possibilities of the role of man and in a vastly changed world. It is my idea, as you who follow the *Si Si* for more than year, to even five thousand years, take them and print up there were still indications and the different forms our own little shadowed past at a single moment a nation most responsible to judge by any remaining stock we have. What was life actually like a million years ago when man and man or we can understand him? What else will life be like a million years hence unless man will die not be man as we know him? In "Green Glory" the pen of Frank Long has played a seductive touch and here and now you'll remember this message very.

**A**S THIS tiny human shape peered silently through the silvery mists, sharp clicks emanated from the magnetic audition disk in the roof of the passage. The clicks announced that the bee swarms were preparing to wage gruesome and relentless war.

To the ant people and their tiny human survivors the bee army's cloudy lunging phase was a vision that obscured the splendor of the sun and stars and the joys of shared labor in the sweet smelling earth. In great procession the madmen shapes moved toward, and Atarus sang and chanted as he led them. He sang of war and glory and sacrifice and death. A huge yellow aphid sat perched on his quavering shoulders and fed him as he advanced.

In his narrow heart Atarus despised the little stupid insect with its cumbersome clavate tail. He knew that wingless aphids had once served the ant hordes with conspicuous honesty but back in the dim legendry ages when his own race was the opposite of complacent. The aphids were mere contented cattle, mere milking milk producers for the omnivorous ant people.

Atarus knew that he was nearly as insignificant as the aphids in the ant people's sight, but he knew also that his own little race had once wielded immense power on earth holding all other animal forms in abject thrallship. The aphids had never endured the hostile forces of nature, and had no idea of the mystery of the far flung constellations and the vague, tender glory of the night shapes which visited men in dreams.

Deep in the earth, in labyrinths deep tombs Atarus' kind had labored,

descended, and died for millions of years, endearing their little May fly quin of life with ardent heroism, and remaining unflinchingly devoted to the arts of death, their world-shaking techniques.

The ants were great. Even uncog nized men like Attaeas conceded it, and were proud to serve as messes for the large-lusted grub, at moments of excitement on the dark path, and as relayers of such severe damage on the calcinated bodies of small spiders, wasps, and still smaller insects.

Along the dungs, glowing tramped Attaeas marched, the triumphant head of the tiny human posseion that had formed by itself in response to the sharp click of the small magnetic disk in the roof of the tunnel.

"War formation—war formation—war formation," announced the revolving disk, and Attaeas had marshaled the others into a smoothly progressing serice line, thirty abreast.

"A man should die glorify when the disks move," he chanted, "With singing and rejoicing he should sing his little worthless personage in the great drama. When can die in defense of the great drama, the eggs in the abdomen of the queen mother are preserved for a destiny to great things—"

The words faded suddenly on his lips. A circle of light appeared in the roof of the tunnel and a long, attenuated figure leaned on his shoulder. The aphid dropped to the ground with a frightened screech.

Attaeas groaned and his little body stiffened. He knew that innumerable men were lined at frequent intervals from the tunnel by the small workers and crawled up through long galleries and vertical chambers to the directing queen mothers in their luscious cells.

At the thought of losing his comparative supremacy as a leader of his kind, Attaeas' brain grew numb. He had thought himself secure, for he had served always with alertness and efficiency. But many were the sins of omission which a man could commit almost unconsciously, and Attaeas was sick with the thought that he had perhaps violated some minor but important taboo.

The fever laid him gently in repose in the center of an immense, chitin-encased hulk. Then the small worker began its slow ascent to the cells of the directing queen. From his vantage point on the insect's back, Attaeas was privileged to survey with acute wonder the war preparations of a hundred intervening cells.

He saw enormous, green bellied grubs resting with a kind of suspended ferocity in long cuticle tunnels filled with fungus-dissolving ichors. Their soft, shiny bodies crushed the ichors with a sponge-like greediness, and Attaeas knew that when the hot swarm dropped their deadly fungal toxins the grub would be impregnable. Though the fungus poison filtered down through the dung earth to the lowest of the nursery cells, the dissolving ichors would protect the young maggots.

Up through many cells Attaeas was carried. He saw entombed drones submitting with patient resignation to impregnation with the needle death. He knew that the drones would be spewed forth in single file with the bee swarms and sow piercing agony in their midst. The needle death was a

microscopic multitude that propagated with unbelievable rapidity and feasted on insect victims.

Ariasus observed also huge, gleaming black workers peering themselves far outside, and soldier ants with flattened heads a hundred feet in diameter which would be thrust into the enormous entrance vents above to serve as stop-gaps against the down-sweeping columns of enraged bees.

He knew that the bees would be battered into lathesque pulp, and that the thin, Rabby bodies beneath would writhe in insupportable agony as the bees impaled them with their long stingers; but to the ant people death was a kind of righteous dedication when it served a socially useful purpose.

Something of this same sacrificial zeal flared in the madly burst of the little creature on the ant's back. He, too, was part of the enormous swarm, and he would have died to save the maggots intrusted to his care as willingly as the ants who raised him.

There were an ominous vibration soaring throughout the great central artery adjoining the cells of the drowsing queen mother. Dear to Ariasus was verily carried, his heart swooning with a sick, foisted identity uncertainty in a small worker.

For several minutes dark dripping surfaces swept past his returned gaze, and a peculiarly fragrant odor assailed his nostrils. Then the glow dispensed about him, and the small worker came to an abrupt halt before a towering barrier of wax. The barrier was fifty feet in height, and it shone with a radiance as of bronzed metal. Without hesitation the insect struck its elbow'd dagger and ripped lightly upon it.

For an instant there was no response. Then the luminous partition bulged slowly outward, and the gleaming globular head of a queen peering out emerged through it. Instantly the head withdrew, and through the rent thus produced the small worker moved with reverence into the cell of the drowsing queen.

The queen cell was aglow with a soft blue radiance. As the little creature on the small worker's back looked upward at the enormous swollen bulk of the single occupant of the cell, a great wonder came upon him. The eight slender scarlet rings encircling the intricate insect's abdomen, and the golden dots on her thoracic segments revealed that she was the supreme ruler of the colony, the great founder queen whose wisdom and power had filtered down as a legendary fable to the little human creatures in the depths.

The small worker turned slowly on its side, and Ariasus did turn its back onto the soft, moist loam which covered the floor of the cell. Quickly he struggled to arise, to stand with dignity before this great being, whose power was so immense, and whose vibrations were so godlike and commanding. But his feet slipped as he rose from his knees, and he tumbled over backward on the soft loam.

He was received by the queen herself. Leaning slightly forward, she stretched forth a curving ligellum and set her gently on his feet. And then, as he stood staring reverently up at her, she laid the ligellum on his forehead and spoke to him in speech that urged its cool vibrations through his tiny human brain.

"You are wiser than all the others, little one. The others think first of themselves, but you think only of us. In your humble way you have the ultimate, selfless mind of an insect."

In sted silence Atanasius continued to stare up into the great complex eyes, bulbous head, and swiftly pulsating thorax. A hundred feet above him she towered, and her immense, hairy abdomen bulged with its momentous burden of a hundred million eggs. Not even the plates in their courses were so awe-provoking in Atanasius' sight.

"Even the very humble can sometimes be of service," said the queen mother.

Still looking up, Atanasius gestured with his hands. He made a sign speech which conveyed that he had no mind apart from her mind; that her willing was the light of his little banian life.

The queen mother said "Little one, the bee swarms are sweeping down upon us in unceasing fury. For a hundred million years they have thwarted our dreams of universal world dominion."

Atanasius nodded, gestured, chanted. He understood. "You may use me as you will," he conveyed.

"I will have you carried to Agushan where the bee swarms dwell in immense metallic hives," resumed the queen mother. "You are so small that you can creep unheeded between the legs of the soldier guardian bees. You will carry into the innermost core of the central hive a spec of Flava-man."

Atanasius reeked in honor. The color drained from his face and a tremor ran through him. Vague hints and rumors filtering down to the depths had obscurely revealed that Flava man was a terrible vegetable pestilence that fossilized all animal tissue.

By a process of intensive hybridization the small workers had internalized the pestilential principle of certain chlorophyll-forming organisms of high evolutionary grade, and had produced a microscopic animal-like plant so deadly and with blossoming that it was a menace to the great dream shelf.

It was rumored that a single spore of properly planted Flava man would overrun three miles in extent and envelop in pestilence a billion helpless bees in the course of a single terrestrial revolution. So prolific, indeed, was the growth of this malignant plant that its deadly curse could not be checked by any means known to man.

Through the servants of the great dream had created it, and knew its value as a war technique, they were not unaware that its successful use might envelop them in utter and abysmal ruin. Hence they had hesitated to employ it, just as long millennium ago Atanasius' own race had refused to sanction certain deadly wise given in their hideous and sanguinary councils.

The queen mother noticed Atanasius' trepidation, and a note of approach crept into her speech. "You will be destroyed, of course. But do you value your little life so highly?"

Atanasius experienced a sudden tragic sense of shame and guilt. He made a gesture of frantic denial as the queen resumed.

"You will plant the spore and return until you are consumed by the

fertilizing growth. If you flee when you drop the spore, it may never blossom. The future of the great dream is in your little human hands."

There ensued a pause.

Then the queen said: "There is something I must warn you against. You will meet the right shapes—millions and millions of right shapes."

Azurru's pulse leaped with a sudden wild joy. "You mean I shall really see and touch the big ones who wait to in dreams?"

The queen assured, "You will see them, and touch them. They will light a great fire in your heart, but you must remember the dream and resist them. Millions of years ago, when we smothered your prior inventors, the right shapes seemed to us feeble weak things. We refused to help them. We left them to perish beneath the weight of the curtains, glaciations, of the great flood of ice that swept everywhere from the pole. Only a few survived and were smothered by the weak and sentimental bees."

Azurru's eyes were wide with wonder. He asked: "But why do these small weak shapes still haunt our dreams?"

"Because men will always be primitive creatures," replied the queen mother. "Even though we have multiplied you by laboratory techniques for millions of years, the old, primitive love of women still burns in your veins. We cannot quench it. It is a source of weakness in your kind, and in that respect you are inferior to the apes."

Azurru affirmed: "I will not forget the great dream. I will banish my heart."

But something within him burst into song even as he promised. He would see the soft and caressing right shapes—see them, touch them,

He said with gesture: "I am ready to die for the great dream."

The queen removed her diaphanous face veil, forehead. She leaned back-ward, and a satisfied satisfaction issued from her throat.

The little worker advanced, perched Azurru up, and set him gently on his back. For an instant it swayed reverently before the great巢穴. Then it hacked wildly out of the cell. When it had disappeared through the aperture the queen-piercing ant let fall wildly forward and beat the beach with a glutinous exudate, from its swiftly emerging mandibles.

The small worker carried its now protein burden up through long tunnels to the surface of the earth. At the central entrance of the nest, four great soldier ants with flattened heads moved reverently aside as the solemn pair came into view. The queen mother had laid upon her little coistary a peculiar and sanctifying soul. He was no longer a leader of his little race in the depths. He had become the potential saving of the intricate dream; almost an insect in his godlike will, vision and robust deliberation.

He was conscious of infinite losses at war within him as he gared upward at the star-flecked sky. Mental dedication and tenacious fought for supremacy in his breast; an unshakeable, overwhelming tenderness when he thought of the right shapes, a tenderness curiously tempered with impetuosity and disdain and a sense of loyalty to the dream. The right shapes were

glorious, but did not the long night of extinction which would envelop him if he died in defense of the immense dream hold a greater glory?

The small worker turned on its side and Atuanus applied to the earth. He arose in blushing moonlight, dazed and doleful by the hard metallic brilliancy of the surface world. His mood warning, scarcely daring to breathe, as the little worker rose on its hindmost legs and emitted a loud chortling snarlution by rubbing its allowed fangs violently against its arms and abdomen.

For a moment as the queen chafing sword increased in volume, he saw only the towering forms of the soldier ants, dark and glistening in the moonlight, and of the little workers beside him. Then an immense dark form came swooping down upon him out of the darkness. It had a wing span of a hundred feet and its laurel-shaped thorax sheath with a litter as of frosty silver.

It came to rest a few yards from the eastern entrance with a loud, vibratory throning. Instantly the little worker approached and touched the summit of its globular head to the great bulging thorax of the zonal form. The form quivered and grew still.

With consummate celerity the small worker picked Atuanus up, carried him to the waiting form, and deposited him gently in a tiny cavity at the base of the creature's abdomen. Touching Atuanus' forehead with its foreleg, it spoke to him in rhythmic speech which urged oddly through his brain.

"You will be carried to Agraban," it said, "It will be a long, perilous flight. If a storm arises on the southern ocean you will emerge and drop swiftly to your death. The great winged one cannot carry you in a storm. If you perish, another spore of Icarra can will be prepared, and another winged one will carry another of your kind to Agraban."

"Where is the spore?" asked Atuanus with excited gestures. Only his madged head and shoulders emerged above the dark, hairless cavity.

The huge worker withdrew a few paces, turned upon its back, and furnished for an instant with one of its foreclaws in the loose crevices of its underside. When it drew near again to Atuanus it was holding a small metallic cylinder. Atuanus took the cylinder with reverence and thrust it deeply into his gazer-burdened brain.

The small worker dashed in head again to the winged shape's thorax. A sudden, convulsive movement shook the great body. It moved spirally forward, raised with a roar and soared skyward. Fright and wild elation poised in ripples through Atuanus' brain.

He had never before viewed the holocephalic drama of the surface world from such a position vantage point. Looking down, he saw the beneath him the craggy surfaces of a city, and looking up he saw the sun at their remote and awful solitude and the planets in their whirling courses.

He saw the great white sun that would burn as brightly when the earth was a cinder, and stars that burned no more, but whose light would continue to encircle the pearl-shaped universe till the unbroken bubble burst, and time and space were merged in some utterly simplifying absolute for which neither Atuanus' kind nor the ants had any adequate symbol.

When Atuanus' gaze penetrated to the awful luminescent fringes of the spiral

nebula so great a pall enshrouded his spirit that he presently ceased to start skyward. Far more menacing was the checkerboard earth here, all with its dark and glistening lakes, rugged mountains, and valleys crammed with lush and mulchless vegetation.

The checkerboard earth was soon replaced by the turbulent waters of the great southern ocean. For thousands of miles Atarnas gazed downcast at the shining water, wonder and fear fighting the ascendancy in his little bosom breast. No storm arose to check the smooth southward flight of the great insect.

On and on it flew in the warm darkness, five miles above the turbulent dark was Hehling volcanoes and white coral reefs pasted merrily before Atarnas' vision. He saw the bronze colonies in their ocean-heaving splendor, scores of indacent shell rising in immense tufts beside the score-lashed waves.

And suddenly as he gazed, the ocean vanished, and a dark plateau covered with gray and yellow fulgur unpeeped his vision.

The great winged one swept downward then. In immense circles it approached the leaden earth and came to rest on a gray, pebble-increased plain. For an instant its wings continued to pulsate with a loud, whirring thrashing. Then the vibration ceased, and a moist bazzclaw arose and crawled in the cavity where Atarnas rested.

The radgit vapour was laved out, and deposited on the dark earth. As he stood staring wildly about him, a frisk faunard on his forehead.

"I will not return without you, little one," entreated the great winged shape. "When you plant the spore, come back to me quickly. There is no need for you to die. The spore will likewise without supervision if you plant it in rich, dark soil. I pity you, little one. I wish to help you."

Atarnas was stunned and frightened. He started back in amazement and looked up dizzily at the great shape. "Why do you disobey the great mother?" he asked with tremulous posture.

The winged form said: "We who fly above the earth do not obey the small ethics of your little world of tunnels. We have seen the burndles in their majesty and the hives in their power, and we know that all things are relative, and return quickly."

Atarnas went. With the glistening lights of the enormous hives of Agynian to guide him, he wove swiftly to fullfill his destiny. Over the dark earth he moved, an infinitesimal shape in a world of encroaching shadow. And as he advanced the lights of Agynian grew brighter till he was enveloped in their radiance as in a bath of living flame.

But no one observed him. The vermin hives were asleep at the entrance of the central hive, and quickly he passed between their legs, which towered above him like pillars of fire in the darkness.

Inside the hive a luminous glow guided his footsteps. Moving with caution he ascended a tremendous mound studded with several dozen young sentinels and entered one of tunnels. The branching tunnel in which he found himself bore a superficial resemblance to the subterranean ways of the ant people.

For hundreds of feet it stretched, its smoothly rounded earthen walls were

gray-green in hue, and it had a flooring of moist, dark loam. Atasmas hugged the walls, taking every precaution to avoid being seen. He was tremulous with apprehension as he moved forward. It seemed incredible that the great central lair should be abutment of life, yet all about him silence reigned. From far ahead a dim bluish radiance illuminated the walls of the passage, but no moving shape crossed his vision.

He continued to move forward, little suspecting what lay ahead. The silence remained unbroken, and the only visible shadow were cast by his own insignificant form. It was not until he had advanced far into the tunnel that he encountered the dark mouth of the bisecting passage and the huge shape which filled it.

As the shape loomed on his vision he sprang back in instinctive alarm, and a cry tore from his throat. But before he could recover, the shag was upon him. It fell upon him, and enveloped him.

In frantic resistance Atasmas' little hands lashed out. They encountered a spongy surface bristling with hairs—a loose, gelatinous surface which gave beneath the axioms of his puny hand. Screeching shrilly, the beastman twisted itself about him and pressed the breath from his body. He shrieked and hammered and tore at it with his fingers in an agony of terror. His efforts were of no avail. The bulk of the shag was too enormous to cope with.

He was dimly aware of a rattling, yellow-lined orifice a yard from his face, spasmodically opening and closing. It drew nearer as he watched it and yawned above him. It twitched horribly with a dawning hunger.

Atasmas lost consciousness then. His eyes reeked below the awful repose of that slithering pockered mouth, and everything were dark about him.

He never knew what ailed him until he found himself getting slowly to his feet in a confused daze. The first sight which unsped his blurred vision was the bee larva hurling earthworms away from him down the tunnel, emitting shrill screeches as it retreated. Then his gaze fastened in wonder on the night-shape.

She stood clearly in the center of the tunnel, a form as tiny as himself, but with a sweetness and grace about her that stirred inexplicable emotions within him. She was holding a long, many-thonged goad, which dripped with numerous yellow ichor.

As Atasmas stood staring, his cleaving faculties apprehended with uncanny accuracy her true function in the colony of bees. She was obviously a kind of guardswoman of the large winged maggot, and the goad in her hands was an implement of chastisement. In defense of Atasmas' little hapless person she had repudiated her function, had fluked the grub unmercifully. It was a triumph of instinctive over conditioned behavior.

In gratitude and awe Atasmas drew near to her. She did not retreat, but raised the weapon in warning as he moved to touch her. Something snapped in Atasmas' brain. The wonder of her, standing there, awok'd a great fire in his breast. He had to touch her, though he died for it.

He touched her arm, her forehead. With a cry of utter dumbfoundedness she dropped the goad and her eyes widened. Without uttering a sound, Atasmas moved even closer and took her in his arms. She did not resist.

A great joy flooded Atmanas' being. For a moment he forgot the past and the sublime destiny toward which he moved. He stood there in amaze, transfigured, transformed.

Then, suddenly, he remembered again. Even as ecstasy enveloped him he remembered the great queen, the nursery attorney of the art people, his reflex function as a servant in the depths, and the great dream. Deep within him, in the dark depths of his little racial unde-mind, the old laziness flared up.

His hand went to his turn, and emerged with the cylinder. With an effort he tore his gaze from the rapt, unarm'd face of the night shape and fastened it on the soft form beneath his feet.

With swift calculation he estimated the depth and consistency of the dark soil. For a brief, momentous instant he seemed to hesitate. Then, with a wrench, he unscrewed the cylinder and released the spore of flora man.

He continued to gaze deep into the woman's eyes in recognition and rapture as the tiny green spore took root, sprouted, and spread out in a dark petrificate thread.

Far away the great winged shape waited with thumping wings as a green growth immortalized two lovers without pain in the central tunnel of the great line of Agra-han.

The growth spread upward and enveloped the little human forms, darkly, greenly, and so absorbed was Atmanas in the woman in his arm that he did not know that he was no longer of flesh and blood till the transforming plant reached the corridors of his brain and the brain of his companion.

And then the transition was so rapid that he did not agonize, but was transformed in an instant, and remained forever wrapped in glory and a shroud of deepest green.

# The Immeasurable Horror

by Clark Ashton Smith

*Clark Ashton Smith is best known for those stories of his which are most or entirely removed from any basis of earthly civilization—fabulous and fantastic ones of time and space. Dismally, however, he has ventured down from his stars to dip his pen into the abysmal horrors of Earth's neighboring worlds. For him, these worlds stand at the forefront and unforeseeable dangers that men, here and there in a comparatively friendly sphere, cannot fully fathom, who plant or animal dooms are ample and real on a planet such as Venus where mystery and Time-travel—who at least must have separated all regions on the same plane of horribly preordained doom. They are there in a sense of the word that only the puniest space explorers will ever fully understand.*

I DO NOT mean to boast when I say that cowardice has never been among my failings. It would be needless to boast, in view of my honorable record as an observer in six interplanetary expeditions. But I tell you that I would not return to Venus for any consideration—not for all the platinum and radium in its recesses, nor all the medicinal saps and poultices and vegetable ambrosias of its torax. These will always be men to imperil their lives and their sanity in the Venusian trading posts, and tools who will still try to investigate a world of unceasing dangers. But I have done my share, and I know that Venus was not designed for human nerves or human brains. The loathsome maliform ferocity of its overheated jungles ought to be enough for any one—not to mention the way in which so many posts with their buildings of neoceramique had been wholly blotted out between the deposit of one spic-bright red the scowl of the test. No, Venus was not made for man. If you still desire me, listen to my story.

I was with the first Venusian expedition, under the leadership of Admiral Carlos, in 1922. We were able to make no more than a mere landing, and were then compelled to return northward because of our shortage of oxygen, due to a serious miscalculation regarding our needs. It was unsafe, we found, to breathe the thick vaporous air of Venus for more than short intervals, and we couldn't afford to waste as overhead on one tank. In 1929 we were back, more fully equipped for all contingencies this time, and landed on a high plateau near the equator. This plateau, being comparatively free from the noxious flora and fauna of the abysmal steaming jungles, was to form the base of our exploration.

I felt slightly honored when Admiral Corfax put me in charge of the planetary coaster whose various parts had been brought forth from the bowels of the huge mothership and fixed together for local use. I, Richard Harrison, was only an engineer, a third stream pilot of the space road, with no claim whatever to scientific renown; and the four men entrusted to my guidance were all experts of interplanetary travel. They were John Ashby, botanist, Anatole Rocher, geologist, Robert Marville, biologist and zoologist, and Hugo Blackheath, head of the Interplanetary Survey. Corfax and the remaining dozen of our party were to stay with the mothership till we returned and made our report. We were to follow the equator, lading often for close observations, and make, if feasible, a complete circuit of the planet. In our absence, a second coaster was to be fitted together, in preparation for a longitudinal voyage around the poles.

The coaster was of that type which is now commonly used for flying at all levels within the terrestrial atmosphere. It was made of neonium-tapered aluminum; it was roomy and comfortable, with ports of synthetic crystal tougher than steel, and could be hermetically closed. There were the usual engines run by explosive atomic power, and a supplementary set of the old electro-solar turbines in case of emergency. The vessel was fitted with heating and refrigerating systems, and was armed with electronic machine guns having a forty mile range; and we carried for hand weapons a plentiful supply of infra-red grenades, of heat-tubes and bone tubes, not knowing what hostile forms of life we might encounter. These weapons were the deadliest ever devised by man; and a child could have wiped out whole species with them. But I could think now of their inadequacy . . .

The plateau on which we had landed was far up in a range which we named the Purple Mountains because they were covered from base to summit with enormous two-foot lichens of a rich Tyrian hue. There were similarly covered areas on the plateau, where the soil was too thin for the sustenance of more elaborate plant forms. Here, among the multitudinous geysers, and the horned, forestic peaks that were intermittently visible through a sun-charged atmosphere, we had established ourselves in a lichen field. Even here we had to wear our refrigerating units and carry oxygen whenever we stepped out of the mothership; for otherwise the heat would have parboiled us in a few minutes, and the ultra-turbulent gases in the air would have speedily overpowered us. It was a weird business, putting the entire together under such circumstances. With our huge inflated suits and masks of green webbing, we must have looked like a crew of demons riding in the flames of Gehenna.

I shall never forget the hour when the five of us who had been chosen for that first voyage of discovery said good-bye to Admiral Corfax and the others and stepped into the coaster. Somehow, there was a greater thrill about us than that which attended the beginning of our trip through sidereal space. The 21,000 miles of our proposed circuit would of course be a mere bagatelle; but what marvels and prodigies of unimagined life or landscape might we not find! If we had only known the truth! . . . but indeed it was fortunate that we could not know. . . .

Flying very slowly, as near to the ground as was practicable, we left the plateau and descended through a long jungle-invaded pass to the equatorial plain. Sometimes, even when we almost grazed the jungle tops, we were straight in voluminous, rolling masses of brush; and sometimes there were spaces where we could see dully ahead for a few miles, or could even discern the whitish gleam of the tropical sun that hung perpetually at zenith.

We could get only a vague idea of the vegetation beneath us. It was a blured mass of black and whitish green, of isolated masses and clusters tinged with gold. But we could see that the growths were of unusually height and density, and that many of them had the character of extremes and giant palms rather than trees. For a long while we sought vainly an open space in which to alight, and began our investigations.

After we had flown on for an hour or two above the sorred jungle, we crossed a great river that couldn't have been so very far below the boiling point, to judge from the volume of steam that boiled upward from it. Here we could measure the height of the jungle, for the shores were lined with timber woods snipped off in ten yard segments, that one for a hundred yards in air, and were overshadowed by the palms down behind them. But even here there was no place for us to descend. We crossed other rivers, some of which would have made the Amazon look like a summer creek, and we must have gone on for another hour above that ironing everlasting forest ere we came to a clear spot of land.

We wandered about that clearing, even at first sight. It was a winding mile wide south in the jungle, whose end and beginning were both lost in the vapors. The purplish and seemed to have been freshly cleared, and was clean and smooth as if a whole legion of steam-rollers had gone over it. We were immensely excited, thinking that it must be the work of intelligent beings—of whom, so far, we had found no slightest trace.

I brought the cruiser gently down in the clearing, close to the jungle's edge, and closing up retropagating wings and armoring ourselves with hatchets, we entered the scorching crystal of the midday and emerged.

The curiosity we felt concerning that clearing was drowned in one wonder before the bordering forest. I think if I can give you any real idea of what it was like, The most exhaustless tropic jungle on earth would have been a mere pink in comparison. The sheer futility of it was stupendous, terrifying, horrifying—everyting was merged, overwhelmed, with a forbidding darkness that pervaded and swelled and roared even as you watched it. Life was everywhere, sooty, burning, pulsating, rotting. I tell you, we could actually see a grass and doze like a dove among its tufts. And the variety of a world beyond compare. Ashley acted like a longshoreman when he tried to classify some of the things we found. And Knott had his poor lame toe, for all sorts of novel insects and arachnids were flopping, crawling, creeping and flying through the mountain woods.

I'm always afraid to describe some of those plants. The overarching palms form with their poorly fronds of unwholesome leaves were bad enough, but the really things that grow beneath them, or sprouted from their bases and joints! Half of them were unbelievably parasitic, and many were plainly

scorpionaceous. There were bell-shaped flowers the size of wine-bottles that dripped a paralyzing fluid on anything that passed beneath them; and the carcasses of flying lizards and strange legless mammals were rotting in a circle about each of them, with the tips of new flowers starting from the putrefaction in which they had been mired. There were vegetable webs in which squirming things had been caught—webs that were like a tangle of green, hairy ropes. These were broad, low-lying masses of fringed white and yellow, that yielded like a bog to sink in the unwary creatures that had trod upon them. And there were orchids of really grape-vine types that crept themselves only in the bodies of living animals, so that many of the forms we saw were adorned with floral parasites.

Even though we were all armed with heat-tubes, we didn't care to go very far in those woods. New plants were shooting up all around us, and nearly everything, both animal and vegetable, seemed to have directory designs upon us. We had to turn our heat-tubes on the various tendrils and branches that coiled about us, and our cuts were heavily dusted with the white pollen of carnivorous flowers—a pollen that was anaesthetic to the helpless monsters on which it fell. Once a venereal behemoth with a diabolical-like head and forelegs, loomed above us suddenly from the forest it had trampled down, his fist with screams of deafening thunder when we leveled our heat-rays upon it till its amored hide began to scale. Long-legged serpents larger than anacondas were stalking about, and they were so vicious, and came in such increasing numbers, that we found it hard to discourage them. So we retreated toward the coast.

When we came again to the clearing, where the soil had been perfectly bare a few minutes before, we saw that the tips of new trees and plants were already beginning to cover it. At their rate of growth, the coast would have been lost to sight among them in an hour or two. We had almost forgotten the enigma of that clearing; but now the problem presented itself with renewed force.

"Harmos, this swath must have been made within the last hour!" exclaimed Marville to me as we climbed back into the vessel behind the others.

"If we follow it," I rejoined, "we'll soon find who, or what, is making it. Are you fellows game for a little side-trip?" I had closed the hatchback, and was now addressing all four of my companions.

There was no desire from any one, though the following of the swath would mean a diagonal deviation from our set course. All of us were tense with excitement and curiosity. No one could venture a surmise that seemed at all credible, concerning the agency that had left a mile wide trail. And also we were undecided as to the direction of its progress.

I set the engines roaring, and with that familiar roar of disintegrating carbon atoms in the cylinders beneath us, we soared to the level of the tree-tops and I steered the coaster along the swath in the direction toward which its nose happened to be pointing. However, we soon found that we were on the wrong track, for the new growth below us became disproportionately taller and thicker, as the mighty jungle sought to refill the gap that had been

claven through its center. So I turned the easier, and we went back in the opposite direction.

I don't believe we missed half a dozen words among us as we followed the track, and now the dwelling of the plant-tops below till that bare purplish soil reappeared. We had no idea what we would find and we were now too excited even for conjecture. I will readily admit that I, for one, felt a little nervous; the things we had already seen in the forest, together with that formidable silent clanging which no earthly machinery could have made, were enough to qualify the equanimity of the human system. As I have said before, I am no canard; and I have faced a variety of ultra-torrid perils without flinching. But already I began to suspect that we were among things which no earth being was ever meant to face or even imagine. The sudden fertility of that jungle had almost unnerved me. What, then, could be the agency that had cloven the jungle, every more clearly than a harvester mowing through a grain field?

I watched the vapors when we passed in the reflexion beside me, and the others all had their faces glued to the crystalline ports. Nothing outward could be seen as yet; but I began to notice a slight, incalculable increase of our speed. I had not measured the power—we had been running slowly, at no more than one hundred and fifty miles per hour, and now we were gaining, as if we were borne in the sweep of some tremendous an-current or the pull of a magnetic force.

The vapors had closed in before us, now they clinged to each side, leaving the landscape visible for many miles. I think we all saw the Thing simultaneously, but no one spoke for a full thirty seconds. Then Morellie uttered, very softly, "My God!"

In front, no more than a half-mile distant, the track was filled from side to side with a moving mass of living angloworm pink that rose above the jungle tops. It was like a sheer cliff before us as we flew toward it. We could see that it was moving away from us, was creeping onward through the forest. The mass gave the impression of a jelly fish consistency. It rose and fell, expanding and contracting in a slow rhythmic manner, with a noticeable dispersing of color at each contraction.

"Life!" murmured Morellie. "Life, in an unknown form, in a scale that would not be possible in our world."

The creature was now rushing toward the worn-colored mass at more than two hundred miles an hour. A moment more, and we would have plunged into that pulsating wall. I turned the wheel sharply, and we veered to the left and rose, with an odd zig-zagging above the jungle, where we could look down. That zig-zag drive warned me after our former headlong speed. It was as if we were fighting some new gravitational force of an unexampled potency.

We all had a feeling of nasal nausea as we gazed down. There were leagues and leagues of that living substance, and the farther and we lost in the tunnel vapors. It was moving faster than a man could run, with that horribly regular expansion and contraction, as if it were breathing. There

were no visible limbs or appendages, no organs of any distinguishable kind; but we knew that the thing was alive and aware.

"Fly closer," whispered Marville. Horror and scientific fascination coexisted in his voice.

I steered drowsily downward, and felt an increase of the strange pull against which we were fighting. I had to reverse the gears and turn on more power to prevent the vessel from plunging headlong. We hung above the pink mass at a hundred-yard elevation and watched it. It flowed beneath us like an unnatural river, to a flat, glistening bank.

"Voyez!" cried Rocher, who preferred to speak in his native tongue, though he knew English as well as any of us.

Two flying monitors, large as pterodactyls, were now circling above the mass not far below us. It seemed as if they, like the vessel, were struggling against a powerful downward attraction. Through the air-tight sound valves we could hear the thunderous beating of their immense wings, as they came to me and were drawn gradually toward the pink surface. As they neared it, the mass rose up in a mighty wave, and in the deep mouth-like hollow that formed at the wave's bottom a colorless fluid began to crack and collet in a pool. Then the wave curved over, caught the struggling monitors, and laped again on a level, slowly pulsating surface above its fury.

We waited a little, and I realized suddenly that the onward flowing of the mass had ceased. Except for that queer throbbing, it was now entirely quiescent. But somewhere there was a deadly menace in its tranquillity, as if the thing were watching or meditating. Apparently it had no eyes, no ears, no sense organs of any sort, but I began to get the idea that in some unknowable manner, through some beyond our apprehension, it was aware of our presence and was considering us attentively.

Now, all at once, I saw that the mass was no longer quiescent. It had begun to rise toward us, very steadily and gradually, in a pyramidal ridge; and at the ridge's foot, even as before, a clear, transparent pool was glistening.

The crater swelled and threatened to fall. The magnetic pull, whatever it was, had grown stronger than ever. I turned on full power; we rose with a painful, dragging descent, and the ridge below shot abruptly into a pillar that loomed beside us and topped over toward the vessel.

Before it could reach us, Marville had seized the switch that operated one of the machine-guns, had aimed it at the pillar and released a stream of dissipative bolts that caused the overhanging menace to vanish like a melting area of cloud. Below in the pyramidal base of the truncated pillar writhed and shuddered convulsively, and sank back once more into a level surface. The crater soared dizzily, as if freed from a retarding weight; and reaching what I thought would be a safe elevation, we flew along the rim of the mass in an effort to determine its extent. And as we flew, the thing began to glide along beneath us at its former rate of progression.

I don't know how many miles of it there were, winding on through that motes-strewn jungle like a glazier at single-works flesh. I tell you, the thing made me feel as if my solar photons had gone wrong. It was all I could do to urge the coaster. There was neither head nor tail to that damnable mass, and

nothing anywhere that we could identify as special organs, it was a seething sea of life, of protoplasm, cells, organized on a scale that staggered all the perceptions of biology. Marville was nearly out of his senses with excitement; and the rest of us were so posturally shocked and overwhelmed that we began to wonder if the thing were real, or were merely an hallucination of nerves disordered by moral and terrific planetary forces.

Well, we came to the end of it at last, where the pink wave was eating its way through the jungle. Everything in its path was being crushed down and sheared—the fine hundred foot ferns, the giant palms, the grotesque carnivorous plants and their victims, the flying, writhing, creeping and climbing monstrosities of all types. And the things made no little sound—there was a low murmuring like that of gently moving water, and the snap or slash of trees as they went down, but nothing more.

"I guess we might as well go on," observed Marville regretfully. "I'd like to analyze a section of this stuff, but we've seen what it can do, and I can't ask you to take any chance with the cause."

"No," I agreed, "there's nothing to be done about it. So, if you gentlemen are all willing, we might as well resume our course."

I set the vessel back toward the equator, at a goodly speed.

"Christ! that stuff is following us!" cried Marville a minute later. He had been watching from a rear port.

Hence on steering forthrightly, it had not occurred to me to keep an eye on the thing. Now I looked into the rear reflector. The pink mass had changed its course, and was crawling along behind us, evidently at an increased rate of progression, for otherwise we would have been out of sight by now.

We all felt pretty creepy, I assure you. But it seemed ridiculous to imagine that the thing could stalk us. Even at our moderate speed, we were gaining upon it momentily; and, if need be, we could triple our rate of travel to higher atmospheric levels. But even so that the whole business made a very disagreeable impression.

Before long we plunged into a belt of thick vapors and lost sight of our pursuers. We seemed to be traversing a sort of swamp, for we caught glimpses of tall reeds and marshy aspects, plant-wreathed winding stretches of voluminously steaming water. We heard the bellow of unknown irrational, and saw the dan craning of their hideous heads on interminable necks as we passed. And once the passage was obscured with barking spray from a marsh-gape or volcano, and we flew blindly till we were out of it again. Then we crossed a lake of burning oil or mineral pitch, with flames that were half a mile in height, and the temperature was uncomfortably in spite of our refrigerating system. Then there were more marshes, involved in sultry steam. And after an hour or two we emerged from the vapor, and another sort of prodigiously luxuriant jungle began to reveal its foaming tops before us.

Flying over that jungle was like moving in a harshh eternity. There was no end to it and no change—it simply went on and on through a world without limits or horizons. And the white, vaporous glass of the molten

ness, ever at zenith, became a corroding torture to nerves and brain. We all felt a terrific fatigue, more from the nervous tax than anything else. Murrill and Fischer went to sleep. Markham cracked at his post, and I began to search for a place where I could bring the canoe safely down and take a nap myself. The vessel would have kept its own course, if I had set the piers, but I didn't want to miss anything, or take any chance of collision with a high mountain range.

Well, it seemed there was no place to land on that interminable breathing wilderness of cyclopean growths. We flew on, and I grew stupor and sleepier. Then, through the swirling mists ahead, I saw the vague boundary of low mountains. There were bare, acutely sharp peaks and long, gentle waves of a bluish stone, almost entirely covered with red and yellow lichens taller than he alve. It all looked very peaceful and delicious. I brought the canoe down on a level shelf of one of the waves, and fell asleep almost before the heavy thudding of the engine had died.

I don't know what it was that awakened me. But I sat up with a start, with a permanently distinct awareness that something was wrong. I glanced around at my companions, who were all shivering quietly. And then I peered into the reflection, where the entire landscape about us was depicted.

I was terrible to believe it for a moment—that wan-colored glaze that had crawled up the scarp beneath us, and was now hanging over the seas of a sheer, immovable, fleshy precipice. It had reached out in mighty arms on either side, as if to ensnare us; it seemed to blot out the misty heavens as it hung there, pulsing and shuddering and all a slaver with rills of a hulky fluid from the mouth that had formed in its front. I lost a few precious moments, as I started the storm engines, and to the usual roar, the top of that leathery cliff lengthened out and fell over like the crest of a barking bellow. It caught on with a halting shock, it enveloped us, we went down roving and gasping at into a sea trough, and our interior grew dark, and blind till I switched on the lights.

The vessel was now hurtling nose downward, as that unbendable wave tacked it in. My companions were awake, and I shouted half-mechanic orders to them as I ran on the full power of our cylinders and also set the electro-solar turbines going. The sides and ceiling of the canoe seemed to bend inward with the pressure as we sought to wrench ourselves free. My companions had flown to the machine guns, they purged them inexhaustibly, and bolts of electric fire tore like a broadside of lightning into the wave that had engulfed us. We tried literally to blast ourselves out, with each gun revolving at the widest possible radius. I don't know how it was ever done, but at last the pressure above us began to give, there was a glimmering of light through our rear ports, and pushing dizzily, we broke loose. But even as the light returned, searching dripped on my hair moist from the ceiling—a thin fillet of water clear fluid that seemed like blood and almost had me out with the sheer agony as it ate into my flesh. I hauled some one sunup and fall, and turning my head over Murrill wedged on the floor beneath a steady drip of the same fluid. The roof and walls of the canoe were rent in several places, and some of the rifts were working madly. That excruciating liquid,

which doubtless served as both saliva and digestive juice, had been eating the adamantine tempered metal like acid, and we had not escaped any too soon.

The next few minutes were worse than a whole herd of nightmares. Even with our death engines power, even with the machine guns still tearing at the men beside us, it was a struggle to get away, to combat the malign extra gravitational magnetism of this hellish life substance. And all the while, Venusian air was pouring in through the rents and our atmosphere was becoming unbreatheable. Also the reimpinging spray was half useless now, and we suffered in a steaming inferno, till each of us donned his airtight insulation suit in turn, while the others held to the guns and the moaning Mowville had ceased to wince, and we saw that he was dead. We would not have dared to look at him overlong, even if there had been time; for half his face and body were eaten away by the corroding liquid.

We soared gradually, till we could look down on the horror that had so nearly devoured us. There it was, mile on mile of it stretching up the mountain-side, with the further and narrower in the jungle below. It seemed impossible, in view of the distance we had traversed, that the thing was the same life mass we had met earlier in the day. But whatever it was, it must have much in our somehow; and seemingly it didn't mind scaling a mountain to get us. Or perhaps it was in the habit of climbing mountain. Anyway, it was hard to discourage, for our gun-fire seemed to make mere pinholes in it that closed up again when the gunner's aim shifted. And when we started to drop grenades upon it from our hard won elevation, it merely thrashed and leaped a little more vehemently, and darkened to a cancerous red as if it were getting angry. And when we flew off on the way we had come, toward the jungle and the sunset beyond, the durable thing started to flow backward beneath us along the hidden travelled slope. Evidently it was determined to have us.

I perked up the rest with the pain of my scared heart as I held our course. We were in no condition to capture the circuit of Venus, and there was nothing for it but a return to the Purple Mountain.

We flew at top speed, but that flowing mass of life—protoplasm, organism, or whatever it was—fifly raced us. At last we got ahead of it, where it dithered in mile-wide dislocation through the jungle—but not very far ahead of that. It hung on interminably, and we all grew sick with watching it.

Suddenly we saw that the thing had ceased to follow us, and was receding off at a sharp angle.

"What do you make of that?" cried Markheim. We were all so amazed by the cessation of pursuit, then I halted the vessel and we hung in midair, wondering what had happened.

Then we saw. Another smaller mass, of a vermin-like grey, was crawling through the jungle to meet the pink mass. The two seemed to rise up in sheer column, like wriggling serpents, as they faced each other. Then they came together, and we could see that they were battling, were devouring each other, were gnawing and lacerating alternately as they flopped back and forth in a huge area from which all vegetation was specially blotted. At length

the pink suns appeared to have won a decisive victory; it pressed on and on, without cease, impinging the other, driving it back. And we watched no longer, but resumed our flight toward the Purple Mountains.

I have no very distinct recollection of that flight; it is all a blur of incandescent vapors, of blazeballs, flaming forests, of hissing batman fires and volcano-spouting craters. I lived in a seething ocean of pain, suffering, vertigo, and, toward the last, a raging delirium in which I was no longer aware of my surroundings, except by fits and starts. I don't know how I held on, here. I kept the course, my subconscious mind must have done it, I suppose. The others won't all pretty well, too, and could not have helped me. I seemed to be fighting innumerable, female, monster in that delirium; and after a dozen cups of incandescent coffee, I came out of it long enough to see that the Purple Mountains were putting their horns from the vapors just ahead. Duly I steered along the jagged taken just and across the gleaming and the glowing batman turned to a sea of blackness, a sea that fell and bore me down to oblivion as I landed the coaster beside the glistening bulk of the ether ship.

Somewhere, very torpidly and vaguely, I floated out of that sea of blackness. I seemed to take hours in regaining full awareness, and the process was painful and confusing, as if my brain were unwilling to function. When I finally came to myself, I was lying in my bunk on the other ship, and Admiral Carter and the two doctors of the expedition were beside me, together with Markheim and Recher. They told me I had been unconscious for fifty hours. My collapse, they thought, had been purely due to unusual nerve strain and shock. But my arms were both in a terrible state from the ravages of the vitreous animal fluid that had dripped upon them. It had been necessary to amputate my left arm at the elbow; and only the most dexterous care had saved the other from a like fate. My companions, though ill to the point of exhaustion, had retained consciousness, and had told the story of our remarkable adventures.

"I don't see how you drove the coaster," said Carter. This, from our expert and prize-winning chief, was an actual brevet.

My right arm was a long time in healing—indeed, it never became quite normal again, never regained the muscular strength and nervous quickness required for aviation or space flying. And I wasn't so sorry, either; my nerves were badly shaken; and I was anxious to let others do that share, when the helot at the mid-ocean station had been called with metal razored by our heat tubes, and another exploring party was sent on along the equator.

We waited for a hundred hours on the platform in the Purple Mountains; but the coaster didn't return. Radio communication with it had ceased after the first nine hours. The second coaster was put together, and went out with Admiral Carter himself in charge. Markheim and Recher also insisted on going along. We kept in touch, with the vessel until it began to approach the enormous nebulae in which the sunlit hemispheres of Vianus terminate, and beyond which are the frozen realms of perpetual twilight and darkness. The radio reports were full of incredible things, and I won't tell you how many of those moving masses were sighted, passing their way through the

hideously fertile jungles or crawling out of the steam-enveloped Venezuelan seas that gave them birth. Nothing, however, was found at the first census. Then the reports ceased; and a black horror settled upon us who had remained in the ether-ship.

The huge space vessel was ill-adapted to horizontal flight within atmospheric levels. But we set out anyway, and tried to find the coastlines, though we all knew there could no longer be anything to find. I won't detail our trip; we all know enough to turn our thoughts posthumously, and those horrors of inimitable life were seen, and chattering in comparison with some of the things that our searchlights revealed on the dark side of the planet. . . . Anyhow, we gave it up at last, and came back to earth. And I, for one, have been well entitled to remain on Terra Firma. Others can do the exploring, and work the Venezuelan mines and plantations. I know too well the fate of those lost parties and their crews. And I know what has happened to the warehouses of non-manganese steel that have utterly disappeared and have been replaced by a half-grown jungle.

# The Morrison Monument

by Murray Leinster

*This could be one of those things about which nothing definite is possible if we can never know in time, and are never backwoodsmen. The answer logically appears always to be no. But if we go back to those already dead, we can "undo" their errors; we can cancel the word of doctors, persons or animals and thereby effect and destroy the future from which we come. But we can never know in time, that we know better than we do. The logical course however is also the case of duty demands a course. The question Murray Leinster poses is this: an architect can stand forward in itself? Is this story he says yes, and poses a picture of what it would look like. It will give our readers grounds for thought.*

SOME TIME in 1957, probably, the Morrison Monument will be very much in the way of a wallowing of *Americana Antiqua*. By the end of the twentieth century it will undoubtedly come up before the New York Board of Aldermen—if that legislative body is still in existence—as a nuisance.

And during the twenty-third century guides will be telling tourists—if they have such things then—a remarkably garbled story to account for whatever form the Monument has taken by that time. Perhaps even in the thirtieth century, or the fiftieth, somebody will still be able to tell some sort of fiction to explain it. But that is what really happened.

The Morrison Monument, you understand, does not yet exist. This is August, and the thing does not yet last September. What will we say be the center of a probably stately pilon it now plunked up atop tall scaffolding. The plunking is supposed to hide the reason for the Monument even from small boys in the tree climbing stage of their development.

It doesn't, and already there are rumors.

Something has to be done to protect youthful minds from the shock they are able to incur by climbing thirty feet up on open scaffolding, swinging out a plank which is severely needed—it is on the northeast corner of the elevated base—and climbing in the hole thus formed to lift up the toppling cover stone. Something positively has to be done.

So I suspect that a monument association will be formed with an executive chairman and committees on place and finance.

I am afraid, though, that funds will not be forthcoming until people really understand about Morrison, and about Craig, and why the Monument not only must be but should be built. Hence the story.

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## CHAPTER I

### THE IMPOSSIBLE HAPPENS

The tale begins, most likely, with certain startling bursts of light seen for several nights in succession on Nassau Street. The first was seen by Patrolman Blum on the night of September 5th. He was walking his beat in the financial district of New York. All the world was dark, and still and silent, and the only sounds were those of Patrolman Blum's own shoesoles upon concrete sidewalk. The atmosphere was one of utter calm and restfulness. Then the first light came. It was a flash of white, unbearable brilliance in empty air some three feet above the pavement and a little beyond the curbstones. The light was instantaneous. It was, and then it disappeared. Patrolman Blum had an impression of something dark and angular below the light, and he distinctly saw a rectangular shadow underneath. Then he saw nothing whatever. He reported it on his beat phone, and a squad-car came to investigate. It found nothing wrong, and so reported.

On the night of September 5th Patrolman Isaacson saw exactly the same thing. The light was in the same place, in front of the windows of the branch office of the *Financial Daily*. These windows had frosty pages of the last edition of the *Daily* glistened up on the plate glass, and the sheets of newspaper glowed blindingly bright. The time was 4:30 A.M. Again a squad-car investigated without result.

On the night of the 10th the same thing happened at half past two in the morning. On the 11th, at 2 A.M. In short, for seven nights in succession, during the hours when the financial district is utterly deserted, an unbearable brilliant flash of white light manifested itself before the Nassau Street office of the *Financial Daily*.

In each case it was utterly soundless. In each case there was apparently a dark object below the source of the light. In each case a rectangular shadow appeared underneath. And in each case there was absolutely nothing to explain it.

The only comment ever made that had any bearing on the matter as later revealed was a newspaper photographer's report. He had been sent to get a picture of the seventh—and as it turned out, the last—of these flashes.

"Nothin' but a light," he reported. "Looked like somebody settin' off a flashbulb to take a picture by. There's no story in it."

The first part of the report was intelligent. The last part was wrong. There was a story there. It was, of course, the story of Craig and Morrison—and Morrison's very improbable career. And (presumably) it was the story of the Morrison Monument, which some day will be built.

Craig was in his office when Morrison was shown in for the first time. This was a week before the earliest of the frosts. It was the 1st of September, and a clear, luminous sunlight shone upon all of New York out beyond the office windows. Craig could look out and down upon a myriad roofs, and on tall towers, like the one in which he sat. There were little plumes of steam rising here and there above these roofs, and in the crows-like trees, below there were many oblong objects which were cars.

By going close to the window he could look down, and down, and feel a sort of incipient vertigo. To a man in Craig's situation at the moment that vertigo was almost an irritation. He would have only to face the window and remove the shading sheet of glass which keeps a blast of wind from blowing in when one wants only ventilation. Then he could lean out—and it would not even take courage to fall. The vertigo would take care of that.

Craig, just then, was in a situation which made such scenes almost attractive. His partner, Ballinger, had committed suicide three weeks before, it was said, and there was a good deal of delay in the payment of his life-insurance to the firm's account. And the firm needed it. It was a big sum, but it would just about take care of several clamorous customers who insisted that somebody had been gambling with their money. Unpleasant rumors were going about concerning the Ballinger and Craig brokerage firm, anyhow. Ballinger's suicide had added to them, and there was a good deal of reason for Craig to look down, and down, and never the vertigo that would make falling so easy. But his lips and fingers felt chilly every time he thought of it.

Then Morrison was shown in. He was a rather plump little man with an apologetic manner. He stood just inside the door and waited for Craig to notice him. He had a small portfolio in his hand and he looked nervous but resolute. Craig turned to him, automatically putting on his cordial customer manner.

"Mr. Morrison? How do you do? You're thinking of opening an account with us? I'll be glad—"

Morrison sleek hands awkwardly. He sat down. He fidgeted, and then opened his portfolio and started to pull a big envelope out of it.

"I—or—before we talk business," he said uncertainly, "I think Ed better make myself clear. I know nothing of business, and especially of stocks and such things. But I want to do some dealing in them, and I need advice."

"Advice on investment, of course," said Craig. He wished he could forget that window and the drop beyond it. "You don't want to speculate."

"I do want to speculate," said Morrison, blushing possibly. "And yet I don't. That is, it won't be speculating. I want to do some stock market dealing on—well—call it advance information."

"There's no such thing," said Craig. He'd thought there was, and in consequence his partner was said to be a scoundrel, while Craig took a sense mission in the long drop outside of windows. "All the information a speculator gets," he added without any mirth at all, "is post mortem."

Morrison had floundered only half heartedly. He was getting out the contents of the big envelope from his portfolio. He chose one sheet and laid it on the desk. It was a photographic print.

"I said I'd have to explain," said Morrison painfully. "Would you mind looking at this picture?"

Craig glanced at it. It was a very clear but quite uninteresting picture of part of a newsstand, with newspapers spread out in several arrays.

"That's quite a close picture," said Morrison anxiously. "It's clearer than most. Even the subheads are distinct."

Craig pushed the print back. Morrison didn't look like a crank, but he assuredly sounded like one. Craig stood up.

"I thought you wanted financial advice," he said severely. "I'm sorry, but I'm not interested in newspapers or photographs either."

"You didn't look at the picture closely," persisted Morrison. "And I do want financial advice. I'm willing to pay for it. Look!"

Craig glanced again. "Nothing but newspapers," he said impatiently. "What have they to do with financial advice?"

Morrison blinked at him. "Why," he said helplessly, "they're tomorrow's newspapers. And they haven't been printed yet. I thought advance information like this would be worth something in the stock market."

Craig looked again, and then stared. The thing was preposterous, was incredible! Here were pictures of all the morning papers of New York, recognizable and sedate. But they bore the date of September 2nd, while this was still the forenoon of the 1st. And yet their headlines were plausible and convincing except—well—the news they announced simply had not happened. Not yet.

Craig stared alarmingly at the plump little man opposite him.

"But—that is crazy!" he said sharply. "It's impossible!"

Morrison nodded in unhappy agreement.

"Yes," he admitted. "It is. That's why I don't know how to set about using it. It's inconceivable, but"—he hesitated and said helplessly—"but it happens to be a fact."

Craig felt a surge of anger flowing over him. This plump, seemingly unway little man was trying some tricked game on him. On land Craig felt much inclined to boot Morrison out of the office, but it was a new game, at least. He moderated his intended tone,

"You took this picture?" he demanded.

"Oh, yes," said Morrison simply. "I brought a lot of them. I expected to have some trouble getting you to believe me."

"How'd you take it?"

"I have a sort of—contrivance," said Morrison almost apologetically. He added, "I'll tell you. I took another picture, of the papers for day after tomorrow. Since it's so impossible, suppose I leave the pictures with you for a couple of days? Then, besides being impossible, they'll be proved facts."

He fumbled with his portfolio as if to find.

Craig scowled at him. "Just what is your game?" he demanded. "What

do you expect to get out of me? Am I to understand you claim to have invented it?"—he finalized for the word, and said impishly—"a time machine?"

Morrison blinked affrightedly. "I suppose you'd call it that. Yes. Of course, a man can't travel in time, but a machine can. Mine carries a camera and brings back pictures."

Craig opened his mouth to snarl. Then he smiled unpleasantly instead. He chose a cigar from a box on his desk, and pushed the box toward Morrison. Morrison's story hadn't the right touch, but he must be a clever crook to have faked those newspapers with their amazingly convincing headlines. It was ironic, though. Until he had chosen Craig for his victim, when Craig was thinking of that window and the thirty-story drop beyond it. Craig grinned surlily.

"Have a cigar," he said with sardonic humor. "Tell me about it. You will get no money out of me, but I'll listen. If you can send a machine traveling in time, why not a man?"

Morrison blinked. "Because," he said passionately, "time is a dimension. It's—er—duration. And a man has—duration or a lifetime, as well as a height and a breadth and a thickness. You know you couldn't shift part of his height—say to his head—up or down without moving all the rest of his height. If you tried it, you'd kill him. In the same way, you can't shift part of his duration. His lifetime, forward or back, without shifting all the rest. Else you'd kill him. I've tried it on a guinea pig. But you can shift a machine, and I've been scolding an automatic camera ahead, as you see."

Craig grunted. "And how does this machine work?" he asked, still with mock interest. "I suppose you'll need some fancy financing before you can demonstrate it to me?"

"No. I've got money enough to go on with," said Morrison dryly. "But I want a lot more because I'm planning a bigger machine that will do things this one can't. So I want you to tell me how to make money out of the advance information I can get. I'm willing to pay you for doing it, besides the regular broker's commission."

Craig stared, and then he was abruptly bored with Morrison. He wasn't a crook, after all. He was just a crook, and Craig wanted to be rid of him.

"You come back tomorrow," he said in the tone of one at once humiliating and dismissing an undesirable visitor. He would give orders, of course, that Morrison won't to be admitted again. "If that picture does check up, we'll talk further. But you realize that I can't act without proof."

Morrison obediently got up, gathered up his portfolio, and went to the door. He smiled a bit uncertainly and went out.

And Craig went distractingly back to his meditations. The window had a great deal to do with Craig's thoughts—Deby in the pages of *Hilbing*; *it's* assumed a hand at many things, and all of them were unpleasant.

But it takes some courage even to look out of an opened window thirty stories high. Craig was rapidly growing desperate, but he had not yet got the courage of desperation.

Perhaps that was why his mind, flying away from the window, came back to the two clear photographs on his desk. He looked at them again, and he did not believe a word of Moretti's story, but he found himself thinking, "*If it were only true!*" His problems would be solved then.

But he knew it could not not be true. Tomorrow's newspapers were not yet in type. Some of the events they would tell of had not yet even happened. Moretti might have guessed the next developments in one news-story, or even two, but the odds were thousand to one against his guessing all twelve the headlines that would announce them. The odds would be millions to one against his actually forecasting the front page of even one newspaper. Against the half dozen or more the photograph predicted to forecast, the odds were millions of millions. They were trillion to one. They were so great as to have no meaning at all.

But Craig was desperate, and an insane sort of hope kept the thought in his head.

Next morning he did look at the newspapers.

And they checked!

In every item, in every detail, in every word and arrangement down to a quirkily blazoned misprint in a sub-head on a financial news-story, the *impossible had happened!* On September 1st, in the morning, Morrison had handed him a photograph of a newspaper which would not even be printed until nearly twenty hours later.

When Morrison came to Craig's office that morning, Craig had not given orders to keep him out. On the contrary, he was waiting feverishly for him.

A great many things seemed to have come to a head all at once. Craig saw clearly that the delay in the payment of Ballinger's life insurance was not only inconvenient but suspicious, and not only suspicious but ominous.

Somebody had a definite idea that Ballinger's suicide had come just a little bit too opportunity for Craig. Somebody was investigating, somebody was looking into this and that, trying to uncover a lead which would break down the official theory of suicide and lead to another conclusion altogether.

But if Craig had much money, to suspect him of murder would be absurd. And there was, in Morrison's machine, a promise of much money. His story itself was not credible. But another was the existence of photographs of newspapers before they had even been set in type. Yet such a photograph had existed and still did exist. There was another in Craig's possession which showed newspaper yet another day in the future. Craig had reasoned thus specifically, to fight himself into belief, because only if Morrison told the truth and could provide news of time yet to come—only then could Craig hope to avoid either the window or something less desirable.

He greeted Morrison with an almost hysterical warmth. Morrison had a pencil under his arm and explained uncertainly that he had brought his machine with him, being sure that Craig would be convinced. He unwrapped and displayed his contrivance, and it looked absurdly like an aquarium for tropical fish, save that it possessed a top, to which was fixed an electric light socket.

There were two levers and a dial and a metal box—mainly hidden by the camera inside—but nothing like machinery or rotors. The nearest approach to a power system was two ordinary flashlight batteries behind the camera.

"I set that lever on the dial," said Morrison seriously, "and press the other lever. The machine snaps ahead in time to the point the first lever is set for. It stops in that moment of the future. The camera shutter then clicks over, and in doing so activates the return mechanism. Then the whole machine comes back to the exact instant it started from, so that—well—practically it's been there all the time. I'll show you."

He fished a bulky pistol from his pocket and took out a flash-bulb such as photographers use nowadays instead of magnesium powder. It looked like an electric light, except that it contained a crumpled mass of metal foil. Morrison screwed it in the socket on top of the machine.

"I'm setting the dial for five minutes ahead," he explained apologetically. "When the camera shutter snaps, the flash bulb goes off. Then the machine comes back to its starting point in time, and we'll see that the bulb's been burst, but we won't have seen the light. We'll see that when we pass through the instant in time where it goes off."

He pressed the starting lever. Apparently nothing whatever happened. The machine did not move, did not quiver. But suddenly the flash bulb was milkily streaked and burst out, though no faintest ray of light had come from it.

"Now we'll wait five minutes," said Morrison, "and you'll see the light. I'm putting the machine on your desk, so the light will seem to come from empty air."

They waited five minutes. Then a vivid, searing, unbearably vivid flash appeared in empty space just where Morrison had held the machine when the bulb were black. There was a dark spot visible under the desk for just the fraction of an instant. Knowing what to look for, Craig saw something that looked absurdly like an aquarium for tropical fish. It cast a rectangular shadow beneath the light. Then there was nothing visible at all.

Craig shook and trembled with his hopes. He led Morrison down to a tenth, thirty stories below. In the tenth he captured quickly what he wanted Morrison to do. The tenth stopped before the branch office of the *Financial Daily* on Nassau Street, and Craig got out and went inside. He stayed there for ten minutes. And in that ten minutes Morrison obediently put a plate and a flash bulb into his contraption, set the dial as Craig had commanded, and pressed the starting lever. Instantly the bulb was burst out. Morrison removed the plate and the spent bulb and inserted others.

He set the dial again, and again pressed the starting lever. He did this seven times in all, making a new dialsetting for each performance.

If you insist on disbelief, of course you can point out that Morrison went through these particular antics on the 2nd of September, in a period of not more than ten minutes, and that the series of seven flashes that appeared at the same spot appeared on the nights from the 8th to the 13th of September.

inclusive. If you insist on disbelief, that is a complete answer to any suggestion that Morrison was responsible for the lights that annoyed patrollers and squelched down in the financial district. But if you insist on disbelief, you won't understand about the Mormon Management.

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## CHAPTER II

### A THOUSAND BETTER A WEEK

Morrison had been very obedient in the trials, and he continued to be obedient in the days that followed. Craig schemed feverishly and demanded photographic prints of most improbable objects, as they would look at most improbable times. Racing shorts—photographed as they would have to hang on newswstands beneath the Sixth Avenue Elevated—to tell him the results of horse races before they were run. Headlines in the more conservative journals to tell him of the race was approaching the World's Series in baseball. Other headlines to tell him that the series would run a full seven games, and who would win the series, who would win each game; and the score running by inning.

Craig acquired feverishly into the policy and number games of Harlem. He sent Morrison into dingy places to photograph—days in the future—the numbers which would tell him the winning numbers before they won. And as the teams of plates yielded more advance information and his memoranda became systematized, Craig's hopes became fiercer and more desperately set to belief.

From the very beginning he laid out Morrison's money according to what the *Financial Daily* would say much later on. Then he waited in anguished impatience for the advance photographs to be vented like the first ones. But while waiting he found that he had known accurately events twenty-four hours ahead, then forty-eight, then eighty-two hours before they happened. He knew that Lucky Lucy would win at Havre de Grace and what odds she would pay before the even went to the post. He knew that 792 would pay off in Horace Joe Griffin's number game in Harlem, long before Horace Joe knew it himself.

He knew that St. Louis would now be the Giants for leadership of the National League while the rest of the world speculated feverishly. He knew in advance the result of the America's Cup races, down to the last protest day. And these things, as they passed, turned out as he had anticipated them.

Down to the smallest items, the newspapers photographed by Morrison's cameras even a week in the future were identical with printed copies when their presses finally spewed them forth. Races, numbers, stocks—the sequence of confirmations was irresistible.

Craig began to use his knowledge of the future on his own account. Through betting commissioners he wagered on the results at Detroit and in Kentucky. In person he put up stakes on such diverse items as the last

three figures in clearance house reports—and I honest Joe Griffit bet heavily on them on the few football games of the season, and on the Flamingo—*one* development. And he won.

Consequently, indirectly, inevitably, he won! He realized that he was not gambling. He was investing, with an eye, in his knowledge that a certain horse would invariably win a certain race; that the clearing house figures were bound to be that way; that as the last develop'd, then the Guards would lose this game by an outlandish margin; and that the Cardinals would win because of a wild throw. He could not lose. He knew!

In three days he was ten thousand dollars ahead. In a week he was thirty. In two weeks he was a hundred thousand dollars winner, counting his pyramiding of Morrison's investments. In three weeks he began to fling money into the market and into every gamble he could find, in such quantities that the inevitable occurred. With a sensation of sheer incredibility he found that he had lost money on a rather shabby stock which should have wobbled, and stated had stood firm. Strikingly he found the Ginger Jar, at Aqueduct, had paid him two to one instead of three.

Craig could understand both masters in terms of cause and effect. His heavy plunging would explain both. But he could not understand how Morrison's camera could be wrong. He went again apprehensively to Morrison and found him crossing unceasingly to himself as he worked with a file and backsaw in the dingy place that was both home and laboratory to him.

Morrison was perfectly content. He had drawn several thousand dollars from Craig and was cutting out queerly shaped pieces of a metal that looked like silver. He could take more pictures whenever Craig demanded them, of course, but right now he was building his new machine. It looked even more than the first one like an aquarium for tropical fish, but it was considerably larger.

"Look here!" said Craig accusingly. "There's something wrong with your machine! It's given me wrong information."

Morrison blinked at him.

"I don't see how that could be," he said unhappily. "What's happened?"

Craig told him. A stock that should have wobbled had not. A horse had paid smaller odds than a time photograph announced. He showed Morrison the photograph of the *Racing News*, with a printed copy for comparison.

The discrepancy was plain. Morrison blinked dumbfounded. He thought.

"I see!" he said suddenly. "It's perfectly clear! It explains some results that have puzzled me, too."

"What?" demanded Craig.

"Why, the future isn't fixed," said Morrison placidly. "It couldn't really be, of course. That would mean no free will, and it wouldn't be sound philosophy. I took two pictures of New York in the year 2400 once, from the same spot and with the same dial setting, and they didn't agree. Now I see why. One was slightly out of focus."

"But I'm talking about these pictures here and now!" said Craig impa-

dearly. "Your theories don't matter for five hundred years from now! But if the machine is going to be marketable—"

"You're interfering with its working," explained Morrison. "You see, we're all moving forward in time toward the future as a man in an elevator is moving upward in space toward the roof. The time camera goes ahead and comes back with reports, as a man might throw a camera up ahead of his elevator and pull it back so him with a string. But you've been doing things because of the time-camera reports."

"You've been gambling for me. It's like making the elevator move closer to one side of the shaft. If you put enough power on the job, you could probably make an elevator break through the side of its shaft and start off in a new direction altogether. If you do enough things, because of your advance information, you'll change our direction through time so well some of a new future altogether!"

He leaned on his own solution.

Then he added seriously, "Come to think of it, I see that I'm planning to change the future for the whole human race."

Craig scowled to himself. He was not impressed in Morrison's plan, and this explanation didn't make much sense. But he did see how he could meet this new requirement for caution. Gamble in smaller sums. Skim the cream from the markets, not try to milk it dry.

"Mr. Craig," said Morrison suddenly, "how much money have you made for me?"

"Quite a lot," said Craig.

"As much as five thousand?" asked Morrison hopefully. "I need some more money to finish this machine, and of course I want to give you a decent commission. I might do with three thousand, but the materials are expensive. I have to have some rubidium, you know."

Craig's lip twisted. He'd already used twenty thousand dollars of Morrison's savings to make himself secure against any survival of that matter of Ballinger's suicide. He had succeeded, of course. All suspicion was officially ended, and he was just really beginning to make money. In two months his savings would have mounted to a dizzying figure. In a year . . . He'd expected to pocket a good bit more than Morrison would ever know about, but Morrison's asking hopefully if he'd made as much as three thousand was humoring. It proved what a fool Morrison was.

Craig laughed internally. "Why, I can take three thousand out of your working capital," he said in private tones, "but you'd better try to do with two."

Morrison nodded, but his face was wan.

"Why the devil do you want a bigger machine?" demanded Craig. "You're making a lot for you with this one. Plenty, it seems to me!"

He waited in contemptuous assumption for Morrison to agree that the six or seven thousand dollars he would get was a handsome reward for solving the secret of time. But Morrison said eagerly,

"This machine will have a longer range. It will go ten thousand years ahead. I can pack books and phonograph records in it! I can send a robot-

picture projector and cameras in it. I'll be able to open communication with the men of the future. You see? I'll give them historical information they'll want, in exchange for technical information we'll want. They may have cracked the atom in ten thousand years! They may have made ships! There's no end to the knowledge they could give us, if we can make contact with them."

"And what'll you get out of it?" asked Craig skeptically.

Morrison blinked.

"Why—why—" he said hesitantly, "I'll be remembered as the first man who ever solved the secret of time. I've my data all whipped into shape for publication, but if I can add *comprehension* from the men of the future, contributing to our technical knowledge . . ."

"You mean," said Craig incredulously, "you'll publish that sort of information? You'll throw away your secret? Ruin your chance to—"

"I'm going to publish, of course," said Morrison in surprise. "Why, it's really important. I'm proud of it. I don't say I'll get a Nobel prize, but—"

Craig stared at him. He felt a savage loathing of the man who did not see how many millions of dollars he could make by the one apparatus like device that was already completed. Because, of course, if Morrison published an account of his discovery, he would make it valuable.

Other men would build other machines—probably better ones than Morrison's. There would be so many machines bringing back news from the future that the future would be changed by men plugging on their advance information. Foreknowledge would cease to have any value because too many people would have it. The supply of exact prediction would equal the demand, and if everybody knew the future they would change it so that nobody would know it!

As a business man, Craig saw the utter stupidity of advancing science at the cost of the secret of the time-camera.

"But look here!" said Craig explosively. "You want money, don't you?" Morrison blinked at him again. "Of course."

"I'll make more of it for you," said Craig irritably. "Lots more! But don't give away your secret! So far, I've only been using your money to trade with"—this was a lie—"and you've been drawing the profits as fast as I've made them for you." That was another lie. "But I know your machine works. You let me make up a stipulate to me: it, keep the existence of the machine a secret, and I'll guarantee you an income of fifty thousand dollars a year for the rest of your life!"

"But—not publish?" protested Morrison. "I'd be throwing away all my work. I couldn't do that—"

"You fool, you'd be rich!" snapped Craig. "Fifty thousand a year is a thousand dollars a week. You'd be a rich man!"

But Morrison shook his head helplessly. A thousand dollars a week was a purely imaginative quantity to him. Without experience of the things money can buy, he did not consider those things as desirable. He was not tempted, because the temptation had no meaning. He was interested in his experimenting, not in spending money.

"I couldn't do that," he said pointedly. "This is a matter of science. If I can bridge ten thousand years of sacrifice learning—"

Craig felt rage sweep over him. Morrison meant this! And Craig had made over a hundred thousand dollars in a little more than a month, with time wasted at the beginning because of his own skepticism. He'd foreseen riches inevitable, and Morrison would throw it away!

"Look here!" he snapped again, struggling to keep his rage within bounds. "How big does a million dollar look to you? I'll give you ten thousand dollars tomorrow for a diamond's option on the machine, and in six months I'll buy it for a million dollars."

Ben Morrison blinked at him in that silly way he had. "You don't understand," he said helplessly. "I didn't make the time cameras to see how rich I could get. I'd like to have money, of course, but—"

He could not explain his attitude. He simply was not tempted by money because he wanted something else. Therefore he refused money, just as a man who wanted only money would refuse any other pleasure. Morrison was mild and even apologetic, but Craig realized that an unshakable obstinacy would make all efforts at persuasion useless.

"You said," Morrison said stubbornly a little later, "that you have two thousand dollars that I'm entitled to. With that much I believe I can finish up the work I want to do. So we'll just call our business dealings at an end. I'm tired of taking passes for you, anyway. It isn't interesting. I don't know anything!"

Then Craig lost his temper. He had reason, of course, because Morrison was withdrawing from a partnership in which Craig had made a hundred thousand dollars in a month, and was withdrawing for what seemed the most foolish, most kickish of reasons to Craig. He used to argue, but Morrison wouldn't argue. He tried to persuade, and Morrison grew suspicious. Then Craig snarled at him. He cursed him for a fool who didn't know what he was throwing away. And then—Craig was very foolish indeed—he threatened Morrison. Because Morrison wasn't interested in making him rich.

The instant after that threat he knew he'd make a mistake. Morrison looked at him very querulously. He seemed to have come to some new, private decision.

"We'll call our business dealings at an end," repeated Morrison. "There's something—strange somewhere . . ."

There was The Morrison Monument. In the future.

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## CHAPTER III

### A ROMANTIC ATTRACTION

Back in his own office, Craig cursed himself savagely for an hour. His rage against Morrison dissolved in a greater rage at his own ingratuity. He should have known that Morrison, being a fool, would be a crank, to

boot. He couldn't think of anything but that oblation of his about science. He—Craig—hadn't gone about it properly. He should have bought that small machine, paying five, ten, twenty thousand for it. He should have cashed in on the foreknowledge it would bring him while Morrison pattered with his new and larger machine. And for a certain reasonable payment, it might have been possible to arrange an accident . . .

Then Craig realized that he was thinking of murder again. First Baldriger, to stave off certain disaster, and now he was thinking of Morrison. He threw the idea fervently from his mind. He'd gone through enough, waiting for Baldriger's invention to be paid to the hilt. He didn't need that now, though it still hadn't been paid. But he wouldn't risk such a thing again with Morrison. Oh, no! He still had access at photographs, going forward a good two weeks into the future. He'd make what he could before Morrison finished his new machine and turned all the future into chaos by his revelations . . .

Then Craig suddenly remembered that Morrison could not finish the new machine. He needed money for expensive metals. Ruthless. He needed at least two thousand dollars, and he couldn't get it without coming to Craig!

Craig became again expensively and contentedly aware of his surroundings. His own office, luxuriously comfortable, and the windows which looked out on a myriad of roads with little plumes of steam rising from some of them and the ailing specks which were cars crawling along the streets some thirty stories below.

He leaned back in his chair and smiled in triumph. Morrison couldn't finish his machine without money, and nobody would give him money but Craig! He couldn't sue for it, because if he explained why Craig owed him, he'd convict himself at once of insanity. He couldn't do anything but accept Craig's terms! And Craig would demand the little time carrots, and he would find out what it was that Morrison needed so fury, and he would use money with some laudability to defy if not to prevent the completion of the big machine; Rothschild, for instance, being so rich, it might be possible to corner the supply . . . And Morrison would toil and tire while Craig used the little machine to take more and ever more advantage of his fore-knowledge of the future.

There was just one flaw in Craig's plan. It was that Morrison did not try to collect that two thousand dollars. He did not appear at all. One day, Two, Three, A week. Two weeks . . . He sent no message asking payment. He did not appear himself. And Craig was working furiously during those two weeks. A liner burst off the New Jersey coast. Shipping stocks dropped. Craig made money. Flowermen shipped their through-burdens from Detroit and Aqueduct and Lexington and to London. Craig made more money. Two brothers shot down a Balkan king and the foreign minister of a European republic. Foreign bonds trembled and munitions stocks went unobtrusively a point or two higher. Craig made more money . . .

And then the information from the future ran on. The photographs Morrison had made for him were accurate to the last least detail, but in the

days passed their accuracy was proven—and then they were merely news and not mistakes any longer. A day later they were no more than history, which is of course even less important than news.

Craig was a rich man, now. He had over a half million in winnings from that queer little device like an aquarium for tropical fish. But that device was no longer working for him. His photographs of newspaper chased dates that were entirely reasonable. They were past days. His memorandum of events to take place and facts to be corroborated with were now all damped by the passage of time. From a man grown desperate, Craig was a man grown rich. But Morrison was no longer taking pictures for him, and he had not even asked for the money Craig had contemptuously told him was his.

Craig stood it a little less than one day. Gambling goes in a man's blood, even when he alternately wins and loses. Craig had won uninterrupted for a good deal more than a month. He would have been more than human had he been willing to stop.

He went to see Morrison, taking money with him. He was prepared to wheedle, bribe, cajole, argue, or even to plead. He was prepared to make the most magnificent of offers, the most extravagant of concessions. He arrived at Morrison's not overly impressive residence just after dark. And Morrison answered his knock and opened the door, and then at sight of him turned deathly pale and tried to slam the door shut again. Craig forced a smile, though when he saw Morrison's stupidly serious face his heart beat up twice.

"I brought you money," he said cordially. "I waited for you to send for it, but you didn't. Here it is. More than you expected. Four thousand."

"You—you can keep it," panted Morrison. He seemed to have shivered at sight of Craig. "I don't want to talk to you. I don't want to see you. I want you to go away!"

Craig forced his way persuasively through the door and into Morrison's embattled living room and laboratory. He saw the new machine. It was three feet or more in width, and four feet high, and nearly six feet long. It looked exactly like an aquarium save for its plastic glass top. One end opened like a door, though, so things could be put in and taken out again. The smaller machine lay neglected on a table.

Morrison stared at Craig, chalky-white. Perhaps he already knew all about the Meemaw Measurement, but it is doubtful. He did know something, however. He looked like a scared, plump, rabbit.

"How?" said Craig, smiling, though his nerves were taut. "Take your money, man! I see that I was wrong. I came to apologize. I've a proposition to make that you can change about in you please! There are millions in it, and it will subserve all the scientific research you like, and you'll be just as famous as you please! I see I was wrong. I'd—I'd like to do something for science myself!"

Morrison made a little babbling noise, his face still chalky. Craig's placatory manner, the thick thumb of green backs he held out, his most persuasive oration, had had no effect at all. Morrison looked at Craig as if he were

paralyzed. His throat worked convulsively. He seemed not to have heard a word of Craig's speech. And hot rage looked at Craig again. The stupidity of Morrison irritated him. He hated the plump little man who could have given him millions, but wanted to throw it all away instead.

"The—the future isn't fixed!" said Morrison desperately. "Please go away, Mr. Craig! Please! I—I know something you don't. I'll agree to anything if only you'll never come anywhere near me again!"

It was Craig's turn to stare. Morrison's mouth was dry. His face was utterly bloodless. He looked up at Craig with a sober poised to strike.

"What the devil's the matter?" demanded Craig. A little bit of fear nagged at him. After all, Morrison could set into the house. He shrank that fear aside. "What the devil's the matter?" he demanded again. "You've got your new wife home buried, I see. Have you tried it yet?"

Morrison spoke through stiff lips. "Yes. It works. I've seen it two thousand years ahead in time, and brought it back."

But his voice was hoarse and terror shaken. He seemed to be trying to shake off an enemy he had no hope of defeating. Craig raged internally because Morrison was so thoroughly a fool. But he could not lose this chance of coming to an agreement. He tried to be friendly, to persuade Morrison to drop his fears.

"It's a big one!" said Craig admiringly. Even to himself, his admiration rang false. "You won't just send this off and swap it back in a hurry! You and you were going to try to open communication with the men of the future. You'll let it stay in the future a bit, won't you, so they can open it and read the messages you send them?"

Again Morrison answered hoarsely.

"If yes. It will stay in the future a week and then come back."

"But how do you arrange that?—Hello, here's a clock! That sets off the return mechanism?"

"Yes." Morrison suddenly said desperately. "You've got to go away, Mr. Craig! The future isn't fixed! It can't be! But if you stay here, you—you'll murder me like you murdered somebody named Ballinger!"

Craig felt exactly as if the universe had cracked open about him. He was safe. He was bound to be safe! Nobody in the world now even suspected that Ballinger was anything but a quack—but Morrison knew!

"What's that?" demanded Craig thickly. "What's that you say?"

"Go away!" begged Morrison abjectly. "The future isn't fixed! You changed it once. You can change it again. You don't have to kill me! Just go away and stay away!"

"But Ballinger!" snarled Craig. "Who told you I killed him? How did you know that? Tell me, or I'll—"

Morrison wrung his hands. He was a very grotesque figure just then, in the untidy little room in which he had solved the mystery of time. The gleaming, shining device which fulfilled the dreams of men was the only object in the room which was not grottoes, was not repulsive to Craig's fleshy nose. Morrison was grotesque.

"You—didn't pay me my money!" said Morrison desperately, "so I—

decided to gamble myself, with photographs from ahead in time. And the newspapers—”

“Go on!” snarled Craig.

“You’d kill Bollinger the same as you’d kill me,” sobbed Morrison. “Go away! You can change the future! Go away! If you don’t, I—I’ll wish a machine back to take a picture of you killing this Bollinger! I’ll—prove you a murderer if you don’t—”

Then Craig’s rage burst all bounds. He hated Morrison for a fool. He despised him for his abjectness. Now for the plump and grabby little fool to threaten him! Something snapped in Craig’s brain. His hands closed on Morrison’s throat. With rage beating at him, with something of terrible satisfaction, he strangled Morrison. The little man clawed helplessly at his fingers, and then made fancy parking motions with his arms and legs, and then gagged, and then was a dead weight in Craig’s hands.

Craig flung him furiously to the floor. “Dead!” he snarled. “You—you fool!”

Morrison did not answer. He would never answer anybody again. And quite suddenly Craig knew what he was going to do. It was quite simple. The future could be changed. He had done it once, and Morrison had planned to change it himself, by scientific knowledge gained from men ten thousand years ahead in time. And here was the machine Morrison had made. It was quite big enough for Craig’s purpose.

His hands were the little time-camera was at hand for him to carry away. Then he opened the door of the big machine and set methodically to work. Morrison had known that Craig was going to kill him. His terror, then, was understandable, as were his plans for Craig to go away. If Craig had understood, he’d have gone, but now he knew how to change the future anyhow. The machine was designed to travel far ahead of its own epoch, arrive in some future period of time, and then come back when a time-clock made it reverse its controls.

Craig started that time-clock. He put Morrison into the machine. He looked unpeckably grotesque. One more thing. He searched for disc plates that Morrison might have exposed. He found them and tossed them into the machine glancing over them for date-lines. He found one plate with a date-line of the future. He read it as well as he could make out the headlined words in the reversed lights and shades of a negative. His hands shook. Then he crushed it, assuring. He flung them inside, too. And then he hunted for any manuscripts which might reveal what sort of machine Morrison had been working on. He found notebooks and flung them in on top of Morrison’s body. He found a sheaf of carefully written description, which was plainly a technical account of the machine and its workings, written by Morrison for publication in some technical magazine. Craig flung that into the time-machine with vengeful satisfaction as the last act in cleaning up the laboratory.

He checked and re-checked his every move. He was moving swiftly, but his brain was perfectly, infinitely cool. Morrison was out of the way. The time-camera was his. And he had only to close the door of the machine

and send it into the future so the future to be changed so Morrison's silly prophecy place would be made strong.

Because there is a rule of law referred to as the rule of *caveat doloris*, no man may be condemned of murder when there is no proof of a death. There can be no proof of a death when there is no corpse, the only man who has seen a corpse. With the flip of a lever Craig would send Morrison, and all servants of Morrison's destruction, ten thousand years into the future. There could be no evidence against him. He would have the little time机器 to make him rich. Forever, now, his every investment would be safe, and his every gamble would be successful, and his every guess would be vitalable.

He sat the dial on the big machine to the point Morrison's scrawled handwriting indicated as "Morrison's Death". He pressed the starting lever. And the machine quivered for the fraction of a second.

But that was all. It did not vibrate. Craig wasen't worthfule. He tried to press the lever again. It did not move. Indeed, it did not even fire to the pressure of his fingers. It was as immovable as it had been cast in place. More so. It was as unmovable as a mountain!

Craig put his hand on the dial. He tried to twist that, to give the hidden machinery a jerk that would set it in motion. But the dial would not move either. The whole strength had no effect.

Cold sweat came out on Craig's face. He tried to jut the machine, as one would put a slot machine which failed to function. And the machine felt as if he had tried to put a cliff. He tried to open the door. It would not yield. More, though the catch on top of it was of the simplest, he could not even move that. Then he saw that the edge of a sheet of manuscript stuck out through the crack of the closed door. He thought perhaps that paper jammed some machinery. He pulled at the paper to free the door. He could not move, or stir, or turn, or even bend the bit of paper!

It was maddening. It was incredible. It was like some horrible dream where one fights desperately against intangibles which are just tangible enough to crush one. He could not even the machine. He could not open it. He could not even move at! And the machine was of glass, and in it was the body of Morrison, patiently strangled . . .

In ten minutes Craig was half hysterical. Somehow, the resistance of that scrap of paper frightened him as much as anything else. He tore at it. He tugged at it. At the end he took pliers from Morrison's work bench to seize it. Nothing affected the paper which a hole while since had rasped in his hands as he flung it contemptuously into the time machine. Then the glass scared him. If he could smash the glass and take Morrison's body away and hide it . . .

But he could not break the glass. He kicked it. He smashed it with a hammer. Presently he took Morrison's heavy vice and battered desperately at it. And the glass remained unshattered.

At the end of half an hour, Craig was nearly a madman. He had taken a section of steel piping and tried to pry the time machine over, so he could attack it from the bottom. The machine with Morrison in it could not weigh

more than two hundred and fifty or three hundred pounds, but the heavy pipe bent in Craig's hands and the time machine was still undisturbed.

Superstitious terror beat him. This thing was monstrous! It was impossible. Even a thing too heavy to be moved will move. It will at least scratch and scar from efforts made to move it! But the time machine was completely unmarked. It was invulnerable. It was invincible.

Craig found himself trying to scratch it with the diamond set in his ring. The diamond did smoothly over the glass glass. It did not catch even in the metal corners. Craig tried it, desperately, upon the paper. *He could not even scratch the paper!*

Then horror seized upon him, and a maniacal狂亂. He beat at the glass with his hand. He attacked it like a madman. He had locked in this machine thing the clear proof of his guilt as a murderer, and he could not send it away. He could not even take it out again. He could not even tear that scrap of paper . . .

Then Craig saw what was written on the scrap of paper. It was part of a sheet containing Morrison's description of his machine. Most of it was inside the machine, but could be read through the door. Craig read it:

*... But an exchange of physical objects with the men of the future is impossible. If a time machine is sent from here, today, to the beyond of tomorrow, it must pass through every intervening instant it would remain in all those intervening moments, and we would see it when we passed through those moments. To us it would be invincible and indestructible. If I have a time machine on a table, and it is there tomorrow, then no matter what I do with it today, tomorrow it is on that table. If it is on that table in the future, if only one five-hundredth of a second in the future, then no matter what I do in a year, it will return, it will exist, it will be in that same spot when that one five-hundredth of a second has passed. It is there!*

Craig read that and cursed it. Even to him it meant the hopelessness of all his efforts. Whatever he did to the time machine, it would be again as it had been, only a fraction of a second later. But he could not believe it. He would not believe it. There was one thing he had not tried. It was the only thing left. He had read somewhere that an ordinary building fire will make a temperature that will melt iron, if it gets a good enough start. Craig struck matches. He gave it that start.

The fire, sadly, burned to smoulder on every floor of the building at once. Firemen could do nothing but save the adjoining buildings. And when the smoking ruins of the house in which Morrison had lived at last collapsed with a rumble and thunder and numerous spouting of sparks, Craig was in the crowd that watched. He was, undoubtedly the first to see the curse of the Morrison Monument. It was a glass box with metal corners which looked rather like an overgrown aquarium for tropical fish. It hung in mid-air, unsupported by any material object. It was not injured by the fire because it was already in existence in the future, and so could not be destroyed in the

present. It could not fall because it was already, in the future, at that distance above the ground. It was unchanged ten thousand years ahead, and hence it was, and is, and will be unchanged in all the intervening centuries of time. If by some inconceivable chance it should be blasted out of existence in today, nevertheless it exists in tomorrow, and when we touch tomorrow we will see it again . . .

Craig saw the fire to see the queer sight. He looked like a devil man, then. He remembered dully that he had forgotten to bring away the little machine, which not being sent into the future could be recalled in the present. It was melted, somewhere, in the ashes of the building. Craig realized that when the others would allow it, firemen would put ladders up and examine the strange object in mid-air. They would see Morrison in there, strangled. In the course of time they would come to Craig . . .

Craig went back to his office. He went up the thirty stories in the elevator which—because it was late, now—was the only one running in the building. He sat down at his desk and wrote.

When he rose to the window and raised it, and then removed the sheet of glass which keeps a blast of wind from blowing in when one wants only ventilation, he was still chalky-white. He had something of the look of a sleep-walker. The last instant before he leaned out, he realized that the confusion he had just written would precisely account for and perfectly cause just the headlines in someone's newspaper that Morrison's time-machine had photographed. But then he looked downward.

And everything happened as he expected. The vertigo that comes of height did make falling easy.

That's what really happened. You probably remember a good bit of this story, anyhow. You may recall the final decision by a group of expert scientists, that Morrison was self-deceived. He did not achieve a machine which traveled in time. What he achieved—the scientists say—was a machine which achieved a condition of relativistic stasis, a condition of absolute immobility with regard to surrounding objects. You can believe that if you like. Another theory scientist couldn't open the machine, and they couldn't move it, and there's a scaffold up with a planked-up box on top of it where Morrison's lie used to be in an apartment house long since burned down. A tarpaulin masks the box further hides the machine and Morrison and all the noise.

Nobody will build a building with the time machine perform enclosed within its walls. There is absolutely nothing that can be done except to build a monument around it, which will be much in the way of a widening of Amsterdam Avenue somewhere around 1957. It will undoubtedly come up as a insurance, too, in the casualty list of the New York Board of Adjustment about the end of the twentieth century, and in the twenty-third and even the thirteenth and perhaps the fourteenth century there will be talk about it.

But you see why the Monument will be built. It isn't even planned yet, but it will be. It must be, if only to protect the tender minds of children from

the shock they are able to get by climbing thirty feet up an open scaffolding, pushing out a loose plank on the northeast corner of the planked-in top, and climbing in the hole thus uncovered to lift up the tarpaulin. But besides the plain necessity for the Monument—Motmans really earned one.

# The Incubator Man

## by Wallace West

The span of man is three score years and ten. That is seventy years, and most of them in full manhood over the legitimate stage of life. Some have the failure or misery and woe, the joys, and drive of disease before that a hundred, because a thousand in the world have much more misery than a few more misfortune than in those fortunate stages to live a life span several times the length of their ordinary life-expectancy span. If man lived as comparatively long, he should live at least five times the average span of the universe—that is to say a hundred and twenty-five years. Considering the young man's desire, is it physical? Is it desire? said David. Wallace West poses this question . . . .

"The best and ultimate test of the ability of man to live long beyond his present allotted span of years would be to have a man from his incubator age, live in what physically would be a sterilized test tube. He would receive no food or air. He would eat sterilized food. He would drink sterilized liquids. He would then be placed as far biologically possible beyond the range of the myriad microbes that in many ways are the causes of man and that bring about many of his ailments. Such a man, growing and living under special conditions, might live to be 200."

—Sir Ronald Ross

**S**IR RONALD ROSS, great scientist though you were, and dead though you have been these hundred and twenty-five years, I lay a curse upon you by these words.

I, Coleridge Norton, the Incubator Man, am that creature Sir Ronald forecast, and I have lived a life of blotted hell that humanity might view me dispassionately through the gigantic glass test tube wherein I have existed for one hundred and fifty years, and learn how to increase the length of life of the worthless race thereby.

My father, Dr. Philip Norton, lived in what was then Newark, New Jersey, and enjoyed a nation-wide reputation as a specialist in germ diseases. He loved germs. He dined of germs. His whole life was filled with germ culture and the new and strange disease he had discovered or had learned to check. In fact, he had almost ceased to be human.

Then, in 1927 A.D., as time was reckoned in those days, he read an interview which Sir Ronald Ross, discoverer of the malaria microbe, had given to a newspaper reporter. In what must have been an unguarded moment. This interview suggested to my father the idea of growing a man under glass, so to speak—I am the result!

The idea of growing a man in an absolutely healthful environment fastened upon the mind of my father like one of the diseases where master he was. It made him give up all his other work so that he might devote his

close to that one place. It made him send me, his as yet unborn son, into the most pitiful slavery man has ever suffered.

I have read how it all was done. Dr. Norton constructed an air tight glass chamber approximately three hundred feet square and twenty feet high. He equipped it with heating and cooling devices of the latest type, and fitted it with pneumatic apparatus, comfortable boudoirs, a magnificent library and a swimming pool.

The glass used was of the then new type which permitted the passage of ultra violet rays. By the use of temperature regulating devices an ideal outside climate of exactly even temperature was assured, winter and summer. He installed filtration plants for the air and water to be used, and an air tight chamber by which food and other necessary articles could be passed into the enclosure without the slightest danger of any germ life entering with it.

When I was born, I was whisked immediately into this prison. While I was an infant a white clad nurse cared for me. She wore rubber gloves and a respirator so that her touch could not contaminate me nor her breath mingle with mine.

I have often wondered what sort of woman my mother must have been to allow her son to be snatched from her so early. According to the books I have read (which, by the way, have given me almost my only knowledge of the outside world!), mother love is not expressed in. Perhaps she also had given her life to science, or did not realize what she had done. I never found out. She died before I learned to talk.

During my childhood the imprisonment wasn't so bad. I knew nothing else. As I became able to care for myself, the more I withdrew. After that I had contact with the outer world only through loud-speaking telephones which my father had installed and through the books and cinema films slipped through the filtration chamber into my cell.

The best teachers were procured for me, the best of books and apparatus provided. The most perfect care was taken of my health. Living under such ideal conditions, I progressed in my studies with amazing rapidity, soon surpassing my teacher. At the age of twelve I passed the Harvard University entrance examinations, and in my sixteenth year was granted a Ph. D. degree. Yes. Dr. Norton had cause to be proud of his experiment.

I remember him well—a man with a stern, hardhorse face, who sat outside my cage day after day, taking endless notes and talking pleasantly with me, yet watching me every session as though I were a game pie.

He induced me to study medicine, and I made rapid progress, and we ran into the difficulty that live animal tissues could not be introduced into the chamber for fear of bringing disease germs with them. So, to this day, my knowledge of medical science is purely academic.

Oh, don't think I never rebelled! I did, bitterly, but my sense of duty, which had been fostered by my father in his many talks with me, conquered my rebellion. Dr. Norton continually pointed out the great service I was doing to humanity—that through me and through him the world was learning to control itself, and to live surely and keep healthy and live long.

The only time I ever saw my father angry was when, in a fit of boyish

rage, I threatened to smash the glass and escape. His face turned white as marble. He stood, trembling with passion, hands clenched above his head, like some prophet of old about to hurl impure words upon sinners.

"Boy," he thundered, "you hold the future of humanity in that club which you have in your hand. Millions must live longer to become wise enough to conquer life's environments. Smash that glass, and man's future collapses into the dust with it. Aye, and if there is a hell, your soul will be consigned to the deepest pit."

What could a mere child do against the force of such a personality? I crouched away trembling and never after that dared oppose his wishes.

His prophecy soon proved itself correct. The human race entered a new cycle at the zenith of dietary truths which I exemplified. Dr. Norton proved that a purely vegetable diet was more healthful for the human frame; that certain combinations of foods were poisonous while others were beneficial; that toxic substances in the blood will kill a man as surely as strychnine; that under right conditions of living, human machinery is little subject to breakage or deterioration—in short, during the first thirty years of my life, preventive medicine was advanced to such an extent that the average expectancy of human life jumped from 35, I to 65 years.

One thing my father had not counted upon was the fact that I would become a man, with a man's dreams of love and fair women. And by the time I reached maturity there was no help for the master. He regretted again and again that he had not also placed a girl baby in the chamber.

It was too late for that by the time he realized the desirability of such an experiment. I believe I hastened the day of his death by refusing to allow him to place a newly born girl in the chamber, even then, so that she might grow to maturity under the same ideal conditions, and perhaps, years later, become my mate. He must have been a swollen ideotics, even to think of such a scheme—and yet—and yet, I loved him and while he lived did not greatly mind my confinement.

I slept eight hours daily, studied eight hours and played eight hours. The best books, cameras and apparatus were provided for my research work. By the time I was fifty I can authoritatively say that I knew more than any one man in the world.

I was well developed physically also, in spite of the restricted space in which I lived, for my father had always impressed upon me the fact that a healthy body makes a healthy mind. I know that I must have been, even then, a splendid specimen of mankind, for I could not help but hear, through my food-speakers, the comments of the people who by this time were flocking from the ends of the earth to see me.

It was a strange thing to see my father and the other members of his establishment growing old, while I remained at the peak of my virility. It has become a common thing to me now then, but the knowledge that death was stalking those outside, while I escaped unscathed, was at the time inexplicably sad.

My father died when I was near fifty years old. With my consent he willed his laboratories and my glass cabinet to the government, with the under-

standing that I was to be carefully guarded and tended. His last words to me were, "Carry on, boy. Some day, through you, this silly thing that I am about to do won't be necessary."

With his passing my last real contact with the outside world was broken. I never could grow attached to the vapor guards and caretakers who took his place, or to the obsequious officials who periodically came to refresh their shallow minds with my learning and advice.

For this reason the thing I am about to do no longer seems wrong to me. I have spent my life in the service of humanity. Men live longer and are, perhaps, somewhat wiser, but I often wonder, now, whether the sacrifice was worth while. At least, in a few hours, I shall know whether the world is worth saving. My only worry is that I have waited this long.

But to return to my story. As the years passed I ordered myself more and more to my studies, and ignored the crowds that gathered outside the walls of my cage to look and admire. I can truthfully say that my scientific treatises, written here, have been the wonder of the world. It was I who first explained the true bone and spine equation, and showed that Einstein, handicapped as he was by lack of equipment and the faulty work of his predecessors, had only half glimpsed the truth in his theory that space is subject to curvature. But enough of such nonsense.

It was when I was scarcely three years old, in the year 2000 A. D., or the year One, Free Time, that the Bolshevik rebellion broke out in the United Americas. There being have been some stupor, now, in me, for I sympathized heartily with those poor, benighted Bolsheviks who dreamed of a breakdown of the gigantic monster of Science; that mankind, like a Frankenstein, is building up about him, and who tried to smash it and return to the simple agricultural life of their forefathers.

Of course the outbreak was doomed to failure from the start, though streets of the country still bled for a few bitter weeks. The very nature which they hated subduced them. How could disciples of Karlism stoop to heat rays, poison gases and atomic bombs? They perished fighting to the last, but I know that for weeks government troops guarded my chamber as though it were a precious jewel. Sad would have been my lot, I am sure, could the Bolsheviks have captured my cubby. I know that I, who was at heart their best friend, was hated by them as the heart and soul of the scientific system.

I will skip over the next seventy-five years of my life with but a few words. Strange—three quarters of a century—time enough for most men to live a full life, and die content. For me they passed in a drowsy succession, enlightened only by my studies and my dreams. As I lay back, I review myself as a hibernating animal in a state of hibernation, waiting for the vital spark which would awaken me.

In me metabolism and estabolism seemed exactly balanced. After my thirty-fifth year, I grew no older physically. I never was sick. I was truly confirming that prediction of Sir Ronald, made so long ago. My only regret was, that my father could not have lived to appreciate his triumph—a triumph which had turned dust in my mouth ages ago, and which turned

no more remarkable than those silly experiments by which early Twentieth Century doctors were able to keep chicken brains alive indefinitely in a sterile medium.

I devoted myself to study as before, until I conceived that I had at my own head the whole sum of human knowledge... I gave out that knowledge to the world until it drew us far ahead of present understanding that we could no longer comprehend it. (It, i.e., the *World*) With so much to do, men classes by the way like a *Loy* wheeles. Well, soon now they must begin working out their own salvation.

And now I drew near the end of my story. As I said, I had conceived that on my one hundred and fiftieth birthday, I held in my hand the sum of human knowledge, together with much that was beyond the comprehension of any but myself. Students from all the world consulted me regarding knotty problems of science and government. I might add, also, that the present expectancy of life is eighty years.

Yet how little we know, poor things that humans are! My complacency lies in *now* about me. A whole new set of complexities and qualifications has been released within me. Three days ago, while resting on the lawn outside my quarters, I was struck by something totally outside my experience. At I lay there a shadow fell on the grass and I looked up at a girl who stood not ten feet away from me on the other side of the glass barrier.

"Good morning," I said merrily, knowing that the telephones would make me perfectly audible outside the enclosure.

She nodded slightly and continued to look at me with wide, luminous eyes, in which there was, I somehow felt, an infinite sadness.

She was a beautiful thing—beautiful with the glory which perfect health and well-being give to our modern girls. Her eyes were dark and soft, with that slightly oblong slant which is growing more and more of an Oriental appearance in the people of America.

Her body was a thing so clear of as it was, reticed by the those like red embroidery band across the breast, which is the fashion of today. Her feet, in little, gold-tipped sandals, were high-arched and sensitive. Her hair was the color of gold taken from India mines—but I perceive I grow ridiculous.

"Did you wish to consult me?" I asked sadly, growing uncomfortable under that steady gaze.

Again she shook her head, but added, in a voice that tickled silver music: "Why should I wish to consult you?"

And strangely, I could think of no reply. What could I tell that robust being that she did not already know?

"Your name?" I ventured.

"Why," she answered, as though surprised that it could be of the slightest interest to me, "I'm Lish Hugos, 3684."

"At the National Theatre," I exclaimed, interpreting the last two figures. "Of course you would be."

She smiled faintly. "Thank you." A pause followed. "I must be going," she said at last. Performance in San Francisco, you know."

And then I said a strange thing. The words seemed to form themselves

without my volition. "Can't you stay and talk with me a little longer?" I pleaded. "It's lonely here."

Again she smiled that slow, exhausting smile of hers. "Can't. I'm sorry. The Torpedo doesn't wait, you know. And then you have your work to do." Her voice sank to the fainting murmur, which she did not realize I could hear plainly through the amplifiers. "You have your work to do—poor thing!"

When I looked up, she was gone.

The hell of one hundred and fifty years of loneliness has been nothing to the hell of the last three days!

Last night I made up my mind to leave all this. Humanity must take care of itself. To be perfectly frank, to hell with humanity, I want out of this.

I am a man strong and young and well favored. I look and feel and think like one of thirty-five and I—am in love. Strange that such a primal urge, which I had considered merely a trick of nature's to prolong the race, should sweep me away at last!

I am going to seal this statement of my case in an envelope, so that if anything happens to me in this strange world I am about to explore, people will understand why I have done this. Tonight I'll smash this cursed glass and go in search of Lilith. Pretty name—Lilith,

*The foregoing manuscript, carefully typed and mailed, was found on the body of Colombo Norton, the Invader Man, who died of an almost unknown disease—the reader—two days after he broke out of his sealed chamber.*

*Attendant at St. Hospital, where he was taken, say that because of his long stay in an absolutely geriatric atmosphere he had failed to develop any resistance to disease and was 100 per cent susceptible to the first microbe which found lodgment in his body. He died a very few hours after being brought to the hospital.*

*Evidently he had spent his time, until the disease struck him, in becoming acquainted with a world whose ways he knew only by hearsay. At least there is no evidence that he ever took the San Francisco Torpedo, as the manuscript implies was his purpose.*

# The Dark Side of Antri

by Sewell Peaslee Wright

*The problems of interstellar travel may prove to be easier than the problems of social understanding with the denizens of other worlds. We have read many stories by recent writers which picture of Galactic Empires. None of these stories show much comprehension of the infinite problems of such contacts, of the puzzling and painful meeting of minds that must take place, soberly and seriously, not brashly and frivolously. In a long ago *science-fiction* story of contact between the inter-worlds J. P. Wright commented many of the great events that would surely be activated on a far-hopping planet. In this story we come at offer to understand areas that which may seem to us to be silly. We know that man may become master gubernator for the race of poor brutes world over or between planets.*

**A**N OFFICER of the special Naval Service dropped in to see me the other day. He was a young fellow, very sure of himself, and very kindly towards an old man.

He was doing a manuscript, he said, for his own assessment, upon the early forms of our present offensive and defensive weapons. Could I tell him about the first Doubter spheres and the earlier disintegrator rays and the crude atomic bombs we used back when I first entered the Service?

I could, of course. And I did. But a man's memory does not improve in the course of a century of Earth years. Our scientists have not been idle to keep a man's brain as fresh as his body, despite all their vaunted progress. There is a lot there deep thinking, in their great laboratories, don't know. The whole universe gives them the credit for what's been done, yet the men of action who carried out the ideas—but I'm getting away from my perky young officer.

He listened to me with interest and toleration. Now and then he helped me out, when my memory failed me on some little detail. He seemed to have a very fair theoretical knowledge of the subject.

"It seems impossible," he commented, when we had gone over the ground he had outlined, "that the Service could have done its work with such crude and undeveloped weapons, does it not?" He smiled in a superior sort of way, as though to imply we had probably done the best we could, under the circumstances.

I suppose I should not have permitted his attitude to irk me, but I am an old man, and my life has not been an easy one.

"Youngster," I said—like many old people, I prefer spoken conversation—“back in those days the Service was handicapped in every way. We lacked weapons, we lacked instruments, we lacked popular support, and backing. But we had men, in those days, who did their work with the tools that were at hand. And we did it well.”

“Yes, sir!” the youngster said hastily—after all, a retired commander in the Special Patrol Service does rate a certain amount of respect, even from these puny youngsters—“I know that, sir. It was the efforts of men like yourself who gave us the proud traditions we have to-day.”

“Well, that’s hardly true,” I corrected him. “I’m not quite so old as that. We had a fine set of traditions when I entered the Service, son. But we did our share to carry them on, I’ll grant you that.”

“Nothing Less than Complete Success!” quoted the lad almost reverently, giving the ancient motto of our service. “That is a fine tradition for a body of men to aspire to, sir.”

“True. True.” The ring in the boy’s voice brought memories flocking. In near a proud motto, as old as I am, the words bring a thrill even now, a thrill comparable only with that which comes from seeing old Earth roll up out of the darkness of space after days of outer experience. Old Earth, with her wavy white clouds and her broad seas—Oh, I know I’m provincial, but that is another thing that must be forgiven an old man.

“I imagine, sir,” said the young officer, “that you could tell many a strange story of the Service, and the warlike deeds have made to keep that motto the proud boast it is to-day.”

“Yes,” I told him. “I could do that. I have done so. That is my occupation, now that I have been retired from active service. I—”

“You are a historian?” he broke in eagerly.

I forgave him the interruption. I can still remember my own rather impetuous youth.

“Do I look like a historian?” I think I smiled as I asked him the question, and held out my hands to him. Big bony hands they are, hardened with work, stained and drawn from old acid burns, and the bite of blue electric fire. In my day we worked with crude tools indeed; tools that left their mark upon the workman.

“No. But—”

I waved the explanation aside.

“Historians deal with facts, with accomplishments, with dates and places and the names of great men. I write—what little I do write—of men and high adventure, so that in the time of softness and easy living some few who may read my scribblings may live with me those days when the worlds of the universe were strange to each other, and there were many new things to be found and marveled at.”

“And I’ll venture, sir, that you find much enjoyment in the work,” commented the youngster with a degree of perception with which I had not credited him.

"True. As I write, forgotten faces peer at me through the mists of the years, and strong, friendly voices call to me from out of the past. . . ."

"It must be wonderful to live the old adventures through again," said the young officer hastily. Youth is always afraid of sentiment in old people. Why this should be, I do not know. But it is so.

The fact—I wish I had made a note of his name; I predict a future for him in the Service—lets me alone, then, with the thoughts he had started up in my mind.

Old faces . . . old voices. Old scenes, too.

Strange worlds, strange peoples. A hundred, a thousand different tongues. Men that came only to my knee, and men that towered ten feet above my head. Creatures—possessed of all the attributes of man except physical form—that belonged only in the nightmare realms of sleep.

An old man's most treasured possession: his memories. A face drew close out of the flocking recollections, the face of a man I had known and loved more than a brother; so many years—dear God, how many years—ago.

Anderson Croy. Search all the voluminous records of the bristled histories, and you will not find his name. No great figure of history was this friend of mine; just an obscure officer on an obscure ship of the Special Patrol Service.

And yet there is a people who owe to him their very existence.

I wonder if they have forgotten him? It would not surprise me.

The memory of the universe is not a reliable thing.

Anderson Croy was, like most of the other personnel of the Special Patrol Service, a native of Earth.

They had tried to make a stoop-shouldered dabbler in formulas out of him, but he was not the stuff from which good scientists are moulded. He was young, when I first knew him, and strong; he had cold blue eyes and a quick smile. And he had a fine, steady courage that a man could love.

I was in command, then, of the *Eros*, my second ship. I inherited Anderson Croy with the ship, and I liked him from the first time I laid eyes upon him.

As I recall it, we worked together on the *Eros* for nearly two years, Earth time. We went through some tight places together. I consider our experience, shortly after I took over the *Eros*, on the monstrous planet Callus, where tiny, gentle people were attacked by strange, vapid things that came down upon them from the fastnesses of the polar cap, and—

But I wonder from the story I used to tell here. An old man's mind is a weak and wavy thing that totters and weaves from side to side, like a worn-out ship, it is hard to keep on a straight course.

We were out on one of those long, monotonous patrols, skirting the outer boundaries of the known universe, that were, at that time, before the linking of all the many nations we have to-day a dreaded part of the Special Patrol Service routine.

Not once had we landed to stretch our legs. Glowing up to atmospheric speed took time, and we were on a schedule that allowed for no waste of even minutes. We approached the various worlds only close enough to

report, and to receive an assurance that all was well. A dog's life, first part of the game.

My log showed nearly a hundred "All's well" reports, as I remember it, when we slid up to Atri, which was, so far as size is concerned, one of our smallest ports o' call.

Atri, I might add, for the benefit of those who have forgotten their maps of the universe, is a satellite of A 411, which, in turn, is one of the largest bodies of the universe, and both uninhabited and uninhabitable. Atri is somewhat larger than the moon, Earth's satellite, and considerably farther from its controlling body.

"Report our presence, Mr. Crop," I ordered wearily. "And please ask Mr. Correy to keep a sharp watch on the attraction indices." These huge bodies such as A 411 are not pleasant companions at space speeds. A few minute's trouble-space ships give trouble, in those days—and you melted like a drop of solder when you struck the atmospheric belt.

"Yes, sir!" There never was a crispier young officer than Crop.

I bent over my tables, working out our position and charting our course for the next period. In a few seconds Crop was back, his blue eyes gleaming.

"Sir, an emergency is reported on Orea, their governing city. We are to make all possible speed to Orea, their governing city. I gather that it is very important."

"Very well, Mr. Crop." I can't say the news was unwelcome. Monsoon kills young men. Have the disintegrator ray generators inspected and tested. Turn out the watch below in such time that we may have all hands on duty when we arrive. If there is an emergency, we shall be prepared for it. I shall be with Mr. Correy in the assigning room; if there are any further communications, relay them to me there."

I turned up to the assigning room, and gave Correy his orders. "Do not reduce speed until it is absolutely necessary," I concluded. "We have an emergency call from Atri, and minutes may be important. How long do you make it to Orea?"

"About an hour to the atmosphere; say an hour more to set down in the city. I believe that's about right, sir."

I nodded, frowning at the twin charts, with their softly glowing lights, and turned to the television disc, picking up Atri without difficulty.

Of course, back in those days we had the huge and cumbersome discs, their faces shielded by a hood, that would be suitable only for museum pieces now. But they did their work very well, and I searched Atri carefully, at varying ranges, for any sign of disturbance. I found none.

The dark portion, of course, I could not penetrate. Atri has one portion of its face that is turned forever from its sun, and one half that is bathed in perpetual light. The long twilight zone was uninhabited, for the people of Atri are a man losing race, and their cities and villages appeared only in the bright areas of perpetual sunlight.

Low as we reduced to atmospheric speed, Crop sent up a message.

"The Governing Council sends word that we are to go down on the platform atop the Hall of Government, the large, square white building in the center of the city. They say we will have no difficulty in locating it."

I thanked him and ordered him to stand by for further messages, if any, and packed up the far-flung city of Cheo in my television disc.

There was no mistaking the building Croy had mentioned. It stood out down the city around it, cool and white, its mighty columns glistening like crystal in the sun. I could even make out the landing platform, slightly elevated above the roof on spiky inches of silver metal.

We sped straight for the city at just a fraction of space speed, but the hand of the surface temperature gauge crept slowly toward the red line that marked the dangerous incandescent point. I saw that Croy, like the good navigating officer he was, was watching the gauge as closely as myself, and hence said nothing. We both knew that the Astrians would not have sent a call for help to a ship of the Special Patrol Service if there had not been a real emergency.

Croy had made a good guess in saying that it would take about an hour, after entering the greater envelope of Arni, to reach our destination. It was just a few minutes—Earth time, of course—less than that when we settled gently onto the landing platform.

A group of six or seven Astrians, dignified old men, wearing the short, loosely belted white robes that we found were their universal costume, were waiting for us at the exit of the Ertek, whose deck, smooth rocks were gleaming dull red.

"You have hastened, and that is well, sir," said the spokesman of the committee. "You find Arni in dire need." He spoke in the universal language, and spoke it solidly and perfectly. "But you will pardon me for greeting you with that which is, of necessity, uppermost in my mind, and in the minds of these, my companions.

"Please me to welcome you to Arni, and to introduce those who extend these greetings." Rapidly, he ran through a list of names, and each of the men bowed gravely in acknowledgement of our greetings. I have never observed a more courteous nor a more orderly people than the Astrians; their manners are as beautiful as their faces.

Last of all, their spokesman introduced himself. Ben Talbot, he was called, and he had the honor of being master of the Council—the chief executive of Arni.

When the introductions had been complete, the committee led our little party to a small, cylindrical elevator which dropped us, swiftly and silently, on a cushion of air, to the street level of the great building. Across a wide, gleaming corridor our conductors led us, and stood aside before a massive portal through which ten men might have walked abreast.

We found ourselves in a great chamber with a vaulted ceiling of bright, gleaming metal. At the far end of the room was an elevated rostrum, flanked on either side by huge, intricate masses of machinery of some character, translucent stone that glowed as with some inner light. Semicircular rows of men, each with an carved desk, surrounded by numerous electrical controls, occupied all the floor space. None of the seats was occupied.

"We have excused the Council from our preliminary deliberations," explained Ben Talbot, "because such a large body is uselessly, my compa-

you and myself represent the executive heads of the various departments of the Council, and we are empowered to act." He led us through the great council chamber, and into an anteroom, beautifully decorated, and furnished with exceedingly comfortable chairs.

"Be seated, sir," the Master of the Council suggested. We obeyed silently, and Ben Talier stood alone, gazing thoughtfully into space.

"I do not know just when to begin," he said slowly. "You men of uniform know, I presume, but little of this world of ours, I presume I had best begin far back.

"Since you are navigators of space, undoubtedly you are acquainted with the fact that Auri is a world divided into two parts, one of perpetual night, and the other of perpetual day, due to the fact that Auri revolves but once upon its axis during the course of a circuit of its sun, thus presenting always the same face to our luminary.

"We have no day and night, such as obtain on other spheres. There are no set hours for working nor for sleeping nor for pleasure. The measure of a man's work is the measure of his ambition, or his strength, or his desire. It is as also with his sleep and with his pleasure. It is—it has been—a very pleasant arrangement.

"This is a happy country, and our people live very long and very happily with little effort. We have believed that ours was the nearest of all the worlds to the ideal; that nothing could disturb the peace and happiness of our people. We were mistaken.

"There is a dark side to Auri. A side upon which the sun never shines. A gloomy place of gloom, which is like the night upon other worlds.

"No Aurius has, to our knowledge, ever penetrated this part of Auri, and lived to tell of his experience. We do not even fit the land close to the twilight zone. Why should we, when we have so much fine land upon which the sun shines bright and fair always, save for the two brief seasons of rain?

"We have never given thought to what might be on the dark face of Auri. Darkness and night are things unknown to us; we know of them only from the knowledge which has come to us from other worlds. And now—now we have been brought face to face with a terrible danger which comes to us from that other side of this sphere.

"A people have grown there. A terrible people that I shall not try to describe to you. They threaten us with slavery, with extinction. Four thousand years ago (the Aurians have their own system of reckoning time, just as we have on Earth, instead of using the unuseful system, based upon the sun), we did not know that such a people existed. Now their shadow is upon all our beautifully sunny country, and unless you can aid us, before other help can reach us, I am convinced that Auri is doomed!"

For a moment not one of us spoke. We sat there, staring at the old man who had just ceased speaking.

Only a man ripened and seasoned with the passing years could have used them before us and uttered, so quickly and solemnly, words such as had just

come from his lips. Only in his eyes could we catch a glimpse of the torment which gripped his soul.

"Sir," I said, "and have never felt prouder than at that moment, when I tried to frame some assurance to this spread-eid old man who had turned to me and my youthful crew for succor, "We shall do what is in our power to do. But tell us more of this dragon which threatens."

"I am no man of science, and yet I cannot see how man could live in a land never reached by the sun. There would be no heat, no vegetation. Is that not so?"

"Would that it were!" replied the Master of the Council bitterly. "What you say would be indeed the truth, were it not for the great river and sea of our native Asia, which have their heated waters to this dark portion of our world, and make it habitable."

"And as for this dragon, there is little to be said. At some time, each of our country, men who fish, or venture upon the water in commerce, have been born, all unwillingly, across the shadowy twilight zone and into the land of darkness. They did not come back, but they were found there and despoiled of their memories."

"Somehow, these creatures who dwell in darkness determined the use of the incense, and now that they have resolved that they shall rule all the sphere, they have been able to make their threat clear to us. Perhaps"—and Ben Tuller smiled faintly and timidly—"you would like to have that message direct from its bearer?"

"Is that possible, sir?" I asked eagerly, glancing around the room. "How—"

"Come with me," said the Master of the Council gravely. "Alas—for too many near him carry this terrible messenger. You have your incense?"

"No. I had not thought there would be need of it." The memories of those days, it should be remembered, were heavy, cumbersome necklets that were worn upon the head like a sort of crown, and one did not go so equipped unless in real need of the clever. Today, of course, poor memories are big jeweled trinkets that convey thought a score of times more effectively and weigh but a tenth as much.

"It is a lack easily remedied." Ben Tuller excused himself with a little bow and hurried out into the great council chamber, to appear again in a moment with a necklace in either hand.

"Now, if your compassions and mine will suffice us for a moment . . ." He smiled around the small group apologetically. There was a murmur of ascent, and the old man opened a door in the other side of the room.

"It is not far," he said. "I will go first, and show you the way."

He led me quickly down a long, narrow corridor in a pair of steep stairs that ended far down into the very foundation of the building. The walls of the corridor and the stairs were without windows, but were as bright as noonday from the other tubes which were set into both ceiling and walls.

Silently we circled our way down the spiral stairs, and silently the Master of the Council paused before a door at the bottom—a door of dull red metal.

"This is the keeping place of those who come before the Council charged

with wrong doing," explained Boni Toller. His fingers rested upon and pressed certain of a ring of small white buttons in the face of the door, and it opened readily and noiselessly. We entered, and the door closed behind us with a soft thud.

"Behold one of those who live in the darkness," said the Master of the Council grimly. "Do not put on the morsel until you have a grip upon yourself! I would not have him know how greatly he deceives us."

I nodded, dumbly, holding the heavy incense dangling in my hand.

I have said that I have beheld strange worlds and strange people in my life, and it is true that I have. I have seen the headless people of that red world Irak, the ant people, the dragonfly people, the terrific carnivorous trees of L-672, and the pointed heads of a people who live upon a world which may not be named. But I have still to see a more terrible creature than that which lay before me now.

He—or it—was reclining upon the floor, for the reason that he could not have stood. No room save one with a vaulted ceiling such as the great council chamber, could offer room enough for this creature to walk erect.

He was, roughly, a shade better than twice my height, yet I believe he would have weighed but little more. You have seen rank weeds that have grown up in the darkness to reach the sun; if you can imagine a man who had done likewise, yet can, perhaps, picture that which I saw before me.

His legs at the thigh were no larger than my arms, and his arms were but half the size of my wrist, and jointed twice instead of but once. He wore a gauntless garment of some dusky yellow, shaggy hide, and his skin, revealed on feet and arms and face, was a terrible, bloodless white; the dead white of a fish's belly. Maggot white. The white of something that had never known the sun.

The head was small and round, with features that were a caricature of man's. The ears were huge, and had the power of movement, for they cracked forward as we entered the room. The nose was not preternaturally arched, but the nostrils were wide, and very thin, as was his mouth, which was faintly tinged with dusky blue, instead of healthy red. At one time his eyes had been nearly round, and in proportion, very large. Now they were but shadowy pockets, miserably covered by shrankless, wrinkled lids that switched but did not lift.

He moved as we entered, and from a reclining position, propped up on the double elbows of one spidery arm, he changed to a sitting position that brought his head nearly to the ceiling. He snarled whisperingly, and a queer, abiding whispering came from the blithè lips,

"That is his way of talking," explained Boni Toller. "His eyes, you will note, have been gouged out. They cannot stand the light; they prepared their murderer carefully for his work, you'll see."

He placed his morsel upon his head, and motioned me to do likewise. The creature searched the floor with one white, leathery hand, and finally located his incense, which he adjusted reluctantly.

"You will have to be very attentive," explained my companion. "He expresses himself in terms of pictures only, of course, and he is not a highly

developed mind, I shall try to get him to go over the entire story for us again, if I can make him understand. Estimate nothing yourself; he is easily confused."

I nodded silently, my eyes fixed with a sort of fascination upon the creature from the darkness, and waited.

"Back on the *L*, too again, I called all my officers together for a conference.

"Gentlemen," I said, "we are confronted with a problem of such gravity that I doubt my ability to describe it clearly.

"Briefly, that civilized, beautiful portion of Aaril is menaced by a terrible fate. In the dark portion of this unhappy world there live a people who have the law of conquest in their hearts—and the means at hand with which to wreak that world of perpetual sunlight.

"I have the ultimatum of this people drawn from their messenger. They want a suitable tribute in the form of slaves. These slaves would have to live in perpetual darkness, and wait upon the whims of the most凶暴的 beings those eyes of mine have ever seen. And the number of slaves demanded would, as nearly as I could gather, mean about a third of the entire population. Further tribute in the form of sufficient food to support these slaves is also demanded."

"But in God's name, sir," burst forth Grey, his eyes blazing, "by what means do they propose to enforce their infernal demands?"

By the power of darkness—and a terrible cataclysm. Their wise men—and it would seem that some of them are not unversed in science—have discovered a way to unbalance this world, so that they can cause darkness to sweep over the land that has never known it. And as darkness advances, these people of the sun will be utterly helpless before a race that loves darkness, and can see in it like us. That, gentlemen, is that fate which confronts this world of Aaril!"

There was a ghastly silence for a moment, and then Grey, always impetuous, spoke up again.

"How do they propose to do this thing, sir?" he asked hopefully.

"With devilish simplicity. They have a great canal dug nearly to the great salt cap of ice. Should they complete it, the hot waters of their seas will be flamed upon this vast ice field, and the warm waters will melt it quickly. If you have not forgotten your lessons, gentlemen, you will remember, since most of you are of Earth, that our sun has set in our own world turned over in much this same fashion, from natural causes, and established for itself new poles. Is this not true?"

Grey, almost frightened looks travelled around the little semicircle of white, thoughtful faces.

"And is there nothing, sir, that we can do?" asked Kitsonide, my second officer, in an awed whisper.

"That is the purpose of this conference to determine what may be done. We have our bonds and our rays, it is true, but what is the power of this one ship against the people of half a world? And such a people!" I shuddered, despite myself, at the memory of that gnawing creature in the cell far below the floor of the council chamber. "This city, and its thousands, we

might ever, it is true—but not the whole half of this world. And that is the truth the Council and its Master lay before us."

"Would it be possible to enlighten them?" asked Crox. "I gather that they are not an advanced race. Perhaps a show of power—the rays—the atomic pistol—bombs—Call it strategy, art, or just plain bluff. It seems the only choice."

"You have heard the suggestion, gentlemen," I said. "Has anyone a better?"

"How does Mr. Crox plan to enlighten these people of the darkness?" asked Ruth side, who was always practical.

"By going to their country, in this ship, and then letting events take their course," replied Crox promptly. "Details will have to be settled on the spot, as I see it."

"I believe Mr. Crox is right," I decided. "The messenger of these people must be returned to his own kind, the sooner the better. He has given me a mental map of his country. I believe that it will be possible for me to locate the principal city, in which his ruler lives. We will take him there, and then—say God aid us, gentlemen."

"Amen," nodded Crox, and the echo of the word ran from lip to lip like the prayer it was. "When do we start?"

I hesitated for just an instant.

"Now," I brought forth crisply. "Immediately. We are grappling with the fate of a world, a fine and happy people. Let us throw the dice quickly, for the status of waiting will not help us. Is that as you would wish it, gentlemen?"

"It is, sir!" came the generic chorus.

"Very well, Mr. Crox, please report with a detail of ten men, to Flora Talbot, and tell her of our decision. Bring the messenger back with you. The rest of you, gentlemen, to your stations. Make any preparations you may think advisable. Be sure that every available exterior light is in readiness. Let me be notified the moment the messenger is on board and we are ready to take off. Thank you, gentlemen!"

I hastened to my quarters and brought the *Fatal's* log down to the minute, explaining in detail the course of action we had decided upon, and the reasons for it. I knew, as did all the *Fatal's* officers, who had saluted so crisply, and so coolly gone about the business of carrying out my orders, that we would return from our trip to the dark side of *Antron triumphum*—not at all.

Even in these soft days, men still respect the stern, proud motto of our service: "Nothing Less Than Complete Success." The Special Patrol does what it is ordered to do, or no man returns to present success. That is a tradition to bring tears of pride to the eyes of even an old man, in whose hands there is strength only for the welding of a pen. And I was young, in those days.

It was perhaps a quarter of an hour when word came from the navigating room that the messenger was aboard, and we were ready to depart. I closed the log, wondering, I remember, if I would ever make another entry therein,

and, if not, whether the words I had just inscribed would ever see the light of day. The love of life is strong in men so young. Then I hurried to the marriage room and took charge.

Bob Talbot had furnished me with large scale maps of the daylight portion of Astar. From the information conveyed to me by the messenger of the people of Astar—the Chor they called themselves, as nearly as I could get the sound—I rapidly sketched in the map of the other side of Astar, locating their principal city with a small black circle.

Realizing that the location of the city we sought was only approximate, we did not bother to mark out exact bearings. We set the *Strela* on her course at a height of only a few thousand feet, and at low atmospheric speed, narrowly watching for the dim line of shadow that marked the twilight zone, and the beginning of what promised to be the last recession of the *dark*, and every man she carried within her smooth, gleaming body.

"Twilight zone in view, sir," reported Crox at length.

"Thank you, Mr. Crox. Have all the exterior lights and searchlights turned on. Speed and course as at present, for the time being."

I picked up the twilight zone without difficulty in the television disc, and at full power examined the terrain.

The rich crops that freely burst from the earth of the sunlit portion of Astar were not to be observed here. The Astarans made no effort to till this ground, and I doubt that it would have been profitable to do so, even had they wished to come so close to the darkness they hated.

The ground seemed dark, and great dark slugs moved heavily upon its greasy surface. Here and there strange pale growths grew in patches—twisted, spotted growths that seemed somehow malevolent and possessive.

I searched the country ahead, probing farther and farther into the line of darkness that was swiftly approaching. As the light of the sun faded, our numerous searchlights cut into the gloom ahead, their great beams slashing the shadows.

In the dark country I had expected to find little if any vegetable growth. Instead, I found that it was a veritable jungle through which even our searchlight rays could not pass.

How tall the growths of this jungle might be, I could not tell, yet I had the feeling that they were tall indeed. They were not trees, these pale, weakly stems that reached towards the dark sky. They were soft and pulpy, and without leaves, just long naked weakly arms that divided and subdivided and ended in little smooth stumps like amputated limbs.

That there was some kind of activity within the shelter of this weird jungle, was evident enough, for I could catch glimpses now and then of moving things. But what they might be, even the searching eye of the television disc could not determine.

One of our searchlight beams, waving through the darkness like the curious antenna of some monstrous insect, cast its ray upon a spot far ahead. I followed the beam with the disc, and bent closer, to make sure my eyes did not deceive me.

I was looking at a very cleared place in the jungle—*a cleared space in the center of which there was a city.*

A city built of black, glowing stone, each house exactly like every other house tall, thin slabs of stone, without windows, doorways, or ornamentation of any kind. The only break in the walls was the slit-like door of each house. Instead of being arranged along streets crossing each other at right angles, these houses were built in concentric circles broken only by four narrow streets that ran from the open space in the center of the city to the four points of the compass. Around the entire city was an exceedingly high wall, both of mud and bristled with the black, glowing stone of which the houses were constructed.

That it was a densely populated city there was ample evidence. People—they were creatures like the messenger; that the Chinese are a people, despite their terrible shape, is hardly debatable—were running up and down, the four radial streets, and around the curved connecting streets, in the wildest confusion, their double-bladed arms flung across their eyes. But even as I watched, the crowd thinned and walked swiftly away, until the towers of the queer, circular city were utterly deserted.

"The city ahead is not the one we are seeking, sir?" asked Crox, who had evidently been observing the scene through one of the smaller television discs. "I take it that governing city will be further in the interior."

"According to my rather sketchy information, yes," I replied. "However, keep all the searchlight operators busy, going over every bit of the country within the reach of their beams. You have men on all the auxiliary television discs?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. Any findings of interest should be reported to me instantly. And—Mr. Crox?"

"Yes, sir?"

"You might order, if you will, that rations be served all men at daily posts." Over such country as this, I felt it would be wise to have every man ready for an emergency. It was, perhaps, as well that I issued this order.

It was perhaps half an hour after we had passed the circular city when, far ahead, I could see the pale, unhealthy forest thinning out. A half dozen of our searchlight beams played upon the denuded area, and as I brought the television disc to bear I saw that we were approaching a vast swamp, in which little pools of black water reflected the dazzling light of our searching beams.

Nor was this all. Out of the swamp a dozens strange, winged things were racing, pell-mell, bat-like things with hooked tails and bone-hooded heads. And like some obscene mimics from that swamp, they rose and came straight for the ship!

Instantly I pressed the attention signal that warned every man on the ship.

"All disintegrator rays in action at once!" I barked into the transmitter. "Broad beams, and full energy. Bird-like creatures, dead ahead; do not cease action until ordered!"

I heard the disintegrator rays governors deepen their voices before I finished speaking, and I smiled grimly, turning to Conroy.

"Slow down as quickly and as much as possible, Mr. Conroy," I ordered. "We have work to do ahead."

He nodded, and gave the order to the operating men; I felt the forward surge that told me my order was being obeyed, and turned my attention again to the television disc.

The ray operators were doing their work well. The searchlights showed the air streaked with fine streams of grey dust, and these strange winged creatures were disappearing by the scores as the disintegrator rays beat and played upon them.

But they came on gaily, gaily. Where there had been thousands, there were but hundreds . . . scores . . . dozens . . .

There were only five left. Three of them disappeared at once, but the two remaining came on unhesitatingly, their dirty yellow bat-like wings flapping heavily, their naked heads unscratched, and hooked beaks snapping.

One of them disappeared in a little silting of greyish dust, and the same ray dissolved one wing of the remaining creature. He turned over suddenly, the one good wing flapping wildly, and tumbled towards the waiting swamp that had spawned him. Then, as the ray eagerly followed him, the last of that hellish brood disappeared.

"Circle slowly, Mr. Conroy," I ordered. I wanted to make sure there were none of these terrible creatures left. I felt that nothing so terrible should be left alive—even in a world of darkness.

Through the television disc I searched the swamp. As I had half suspected, the little ones held the young of the race of things grub-like creatures that flipped their heavy bodies about in the slime, stunned by the light which searched them out.

"All disintegrator rays on the swamp," I ordered. "Sweep it from margin to margin. Let nothing be left alive there."

I had a well trained crew. The disintegrator rays massed themselves into a marching wall of death, and swept up and down the swamp as a plough turns its furrows.

It was easy to trace their passage, for behind them the swamp disappeared, leaving in its stead row after row of burnt, dusty paths. When we had finished there was no swamp; there was only a linked area upon which nothing lived, and upon which, for many years, nothing would grow.

"Good work," I commanded the disintegrator ray men. "Cease action." And then, to Conroy, "Put her on her course again, please."

An hour went by. We passed several more of the strange, damp circular cities, differing from the first we had seen only in the matter of size. Another hour passed, and I became anxious. If we were on our proper course, and I had understood the Chinese messenger correctly, we should be very close to the governing city. We should—

The waving beam of one of the searchlights came suddenly to rest. Three or four other beams followed it—and then all the others.

"Large city to port, sir!" called Gray excitedly.

"Thank you, I believe it is our destination. Cut all searchlights except the forward beam, Mr. Conroy!"

"Yes, sir."

"You can take her over slowly now, I believe. The forward searchlight beam will keep our destination in view for you. Set her down carefully in the center of the city in any suitable place. And—remember, at the controls stand by my orders, and have the operating room crew do likewise."

"Yes, sir," said Conroy sharply.

With a timorous I could not control, I bent over the hooded television disc and studied the mighty governing city of the Chusee.

The governing city of the Chusee was not unlike the others we had seen, save that it was very much larger, and had eight spoke-like wheels radiating from its center, instead of four. The protective wall was both thicker and higher.

There was another difference. Instead of a great open space in the center of the city, there was a central, park-like space, in the middle of which was a massive gate, circular in shape, and built, like all the rest of the city, of the black, crusting rock which seemed to be the sole building material of the Chusee.

We set the *Friedl* down close to the big circular building, which we guessed—and correctly—to be the seat of government. I ordered the searchlight ray to be extinguished the moment we landed, and the other tubes that illuminated our ship used to be turned off, so that we might accustom our eyes as much as possible to darkness, finding our way about with aerial ethion tube flashlight.

With a small guard, I moved at the forward exit of the *Friedl* and watched the huge creature dove back out on its mighty threads, and finally swing to one side on its massive gribul. *Crap*—the only oaths with me—and I both wore our incrusts, and carried full expeditionary equipment, as did the ground.

The Chusee messenger, grinning and talking excitedly in his abhor, whirring voice, crouched on all fours (he could not stand in that small space) and waited, three men of the guard on either side of him. I placed the incrust on his head and gave him simple, forceful orders, picturing them for him as best I could:

"Go from this place and find others of your kind. Tell them that we would speak to them with things such as you have upon your head. Run swiftly!"

"I will run," he conveyed to me, "to those great ones who sent me!" He pictured them flatly. They were creatures like himself, save that they were elaborately dressed in fine skins of several pale colors, and wore upon their arms, between their two elbows, broad circles of curved metal which I took to be emblems of power or authority, since the chief of them all wore a very broad band. Their faces were much more intelligent than their messenger had led me to expect, and their eyes, very large and round, and not at all human, were the eyes of thoughtful, reasoning creatures.

Doubled on all fours, the Chusee crept through the circular exit, and

straightened up. As he did so, from out of the darkness a score or more of his followers rushed up, gathering around him, and blocking the exit with their ready legs. We could hear them talking excitedly in high-pitched, squeaky whispers. Then, suddenly I received an impression from the Chase who were the masters:

"Those who are with me have come from those in power. They say one of you, and one only, is to come with us to our big men who will listen, through a thing such as I wear upon my head, that which you wish to say to them. You are to come quickly at once."

"I will come," I replied. "Have those with you make way—"

A heavy hand fell upon my shoulder; a voice spoke eagerly in my ear:

"Sit, you must not go!" it was Crox, and his voice awoke with faltering. "You are in command of the *Kreuk*, sir, and those in her need you. Let me go! I trust, sir!"

I turned in the darkness, quickly and angrily.

"Mr. Crox," I said swiftly, "do you realize that you are speaking to your commanding officer?"

I felt his grip tighten on my arm as the reproach struck home.

"Yes, sir," he said doggedly. "I do. But I repeat that your duty commands you to remain here."

"The duty of a commander in this Service leads him to the place of greatest danger, Mr. Crox," I informed him.

"Then stay with your ship, sir!" he pleaded, craftily. "This may be some trick to get you away, so that they may attack us. Please! Can't you see that I am right, sir?"

I thought swiftly. The correctness of the youngster had searched me. Beneath the formality and the "sir" there was a real affection between us.

In the darkness I reached for his hand; I found it and shook it suddenly—a gesture of Earth which is a hard to explain. It means many things.

"Go, then, Andy," I said softly. "But do not stay long. An hour at the longest. If you are not back in that length of time, we'll come after you, and whatever else may happen, you can be sure that you will be well avenged. The *Kreuk* has not lost her sting!"

"Thank you, John," he replied. "Remember that I shall wear my master. If I adjust it to full power, and you do likewise, and stand without the shelter of the *Kreuk*'s metal hull, I shall be able to communicate with you, should there be any danger." He pressed my hand again, and strode through the exit out into the darkness, which was lit only by a few distant stars.

The long, silta legs closed in around him, like a pigmy guarded by the skeletons of giants he was led quickly away.

The silence dragged by. There was a nervous tension on the ship, the like of which I have experienced not more than a dozen times in all my years.

No one spoke aloud. Now and again one man would whisper privately to another; there would be a swift, muffled response, and silence again. We were waiting—waiting.

Ten minutes went by. Twenty. Thirty.

Impatiently I paced up and down before the exit, the guards at their posts, ready to obey any orders instantly.

Fifty-five minutes, I walked through the exit; stepped out onto the cold, hard earth.

I could see, behind me, the shadowy bulk of the *Frisch*. Before me, a black, dangerous blot against the star-sprinkled sky, was the great administrative building of the *Chise*. And on there, somewhere, was *Aarakoth* City. I glanced down at the luminous dial of my watch. Fifty minutes. In ten minutes more—

"John Hansen!" My name reached me, faintly but clearly, through the medium of my vision. "This is Grey. Do you understand me?"

"Yes," I replied hurriedly. "Are you safe?"

"I am safe. All is well. Very well. Will you permit me now to relate what I am about to say, without interruption?"

"Yes," I replied, thoughtlessly and eagerly. "What is it?"

"I have had a long conference with the chief or head of the *Chise*," explained Grey rapidly. "He is very intelligent, and his people are much further advanced than we thought.

"Through some form of communication, he has learned of the fight with the wood-hawks; it seems that they are—or were—the most dreaded of all the creatures of this dark world. Apparently, we got the whole brood of them, and this chief, whose name, I gather, is *Wischien*, or something like that, is naturally much impressed.

"I have given him a demonstration or two with my assault pistol and the flashlight—these people are fully stricken by a ray of light directly in the eyes—and we have reached very favorable terms.

"I am to remain here as chief bodyguard and adviser, of which he has need, for all is not peaceful, I gather, in the kingdom of darkness. In return, he is to give up his plan to subjugate the rest of Arari; he has sworn to do this by what is evidently, to him, a very sacred oath, witnessed solemnly by the rest of his council.

"Under the circumstances, I believe he will do what he says; in any case, the great canal will be filled in, and the *Aarakoth* will have plenty of time to erect a great series of diaphragms across the entire twilight zone, using the broad fan rays to form a solid wall against which the *Chise* could not advance even did they, at some future date, carry on their plans. The worst possible result then would be that the people in the scrub portion would have to migrate from certain sections, and perhaps would have day and night, apparently, in the other worlds.

"This is the agreement we have reached; it is the only one that will save this world. Do you approve, sir?"

"Not *Brown* immediately, and we will show the *Chise* that they cannot hold an officer of the Special Patrol as a hostage. Make haste!"

"It's no go, sir," came the reply reluctantly. "I threatened them first. I explained what our diaphragm rays would do, and *Wischien* laughed at me."

"This city is built upon great subterranean passages that lead to many

hidden exits. If we show the least sign of hostility the work will be returned on the canal, and before we can locate the spot, and stop the work, the damage will be done.

"This is our only chance, sir, to make this expedition a complete success. Permit me to judge this fact from the evidence I have before me. Whatever sacrifice there is to make, I make gladly. Whochkin says that you depart at once, and in peace, and I know this is the only course. Good-bye, they convey my salutations to my other friends upon the old *Front*, and elsewhere. And now, lest my last act as an officer of the Special Patrol Service be to refuse to obey the commands of my superior officer, I am removing the measure. Good-bye!"

I tried to reach him again, but there was no response.

Good! He was gone! Swallowed up in darkness and in silence!

Dazed, shaken to the very foundation of my being, I stood there between the shadowy bulk of the *Front* and the towering mass of the great silent pile that was the seat of government in this strange land of darkness, and gazed up at the dark sky above me. I am not ashamed, now, to say that hot tears trickled down my cheeks nor that as I turned back to the *Front*, my throat was so gripped by emotion that I could not speak.

I ordered the exit closed with a wave of my hand; in the navigating room I said but few words. "We depart at once."

At the third meal of the day I gathered my officers about me and told them, as quickly and as gently as I could, of the sacrifice one of their number had made.

It was Kincaide who, when I had finished, rose slowly and made reply, "Sir," he said quietly, "we had a friend. Some day, he might have died. Now he will live forever in the records of the Service, in the memory of a world, and in the hearts of those who had the honor to serve with him. Could he—or we—with more?"

Again a strange silence he sat down again, and there was not an eye among us that was dry.

I hope that the happy young officer who visited me the other day reads this little account of bygone times.

Perhaps it will make clear to him how we worked, in those ready forgotten days, with the tools we had at hand. They were not the perfect tools of to-day, but what they lacked, we somehow made up.

That fine old motto of the Service, "Nothing Less Than Complete Success," we passed on untaught to those who came after us.

I hope these youngsters of to-day may do as well.

# Blind Flight

by Donald A. Wollheim

*At the time this story was written, radar was a closely guarded military secret in which the author had no access. But the fact of radar is an important factor in this story. The story was inspired in an answer to the often posed and usually created problem of how life can be preserved during a space flight when the methods of care of an animal human such as the one we give full play on the small world within the swiffling *Manley of the atmosphere*. It is a far more dangerous problem than medical engineers admit. It may well be that such a space space flight as the one in this story may be the norm for those days to come. A space flight devoid of carry cases, rancidities, poisons, of man uniform. It is a fact that of what we know of cosmic rays and similar nuclear rays there out to be as deadly as suspected that no space flight will ever see the stars!*

EDWARD SEDGWICK took a last glimpse at the steel sphere he was to occupy for the next few days, glanced once again at the blue sky, shook hands with the head of the Commission on Space Flight, climbed up the metal ladder and crawled into the circular orifice just under the sphere's equator. As he progressed on hands and knees down the narrow tubular passage, the hissing and click of the thick metal plug being fastened hermetically behind him, brought to his attention that he was now entirely cut off from the world of man.

The huge ball, towards whose exact center he so laboriously crawled, was about one hundred feet in diameter and perfectly spherical. Though the outer surface was honeycombed with vent and sensitive cells, there was no window or viewing pane of any description. Sedgwick was being initiated alive in the middle of this globe of metal; yet, as the disks of other metal partitions fell into place behind him, he was not afraid in the slightest.

He had wondered whether he would feel fear when the day for the real test came. Sometimes he had awakened at night with a cold sweat and a ghastly dream of horrid alibi in an iron coffin. Yet now, as he neared the little bubble at the core, he realized in a detached objective sort of way that he was quite calm and collected. He knew that was the factor which had made him desirable for this job, nonetheless each time he realized it, it came at a cost of surprise.

Now he climbed down into the control bubble and the last door swung shut, sealing off the passage. He seated himself in the heavily cushioned

swivel chair that swung so marvelously on universal pivots. He could swing this about around by merely shifting his body so that it could face any conceivable part of the perfectly globed interior of his chamber. No matter to the fact that if he tried it now he might be hanging upside down. Very soon things like up and down would cease to exist save as unfunctioning markings on two or three of the immovable dials and controls that waddled the control bubble's exterior. He could reach out with a hand and touch anything in it, so small was it, yet he was not stifled or crowded. He had switched on the air and conditioning mechanism as soon as he entered and he knew that the living conditions in the tiny room would remain habitable and comfortable indefinitely.

Fool proof automatic controls were in operation. The air was constantly being cleaned and replaced. The temperature of the chamber would never vary by more than two degrees no matter when the outside conditions were.

Sedgwick strapped himself in and swivelled around to face the planet-bound controls. From his central position he was like the bone of a will that drives a body from its hidden place in the shallower circled brain. His eyes darted easily over the readings with the skill that came of months' intensive training. Outside temperature on top of the sphere was 85, on the bottom 64. It was a hot day and the sun shining on the metal did that, he knew. He knew exactly which way he now faced and exactly what atmospheric conditions were. He glanced at the time and saw that he should start. He reached over and turned a switch. Power was on now and the lights on the sphere's exterior glowed. That was a signal to the crowd outside to clear away.

He allowed five minutes and then pressed eight buttons on the rocket panel and threw the master control. There was a slight jolt and he felt his seat taking up the added pressure of his body. His acceleration meter was now in operation and he watched carefully as his speed mounted. The sphere was plunging upwards into the sky, his controls told him, the rocket units on the earth side of the globe blasting away. He set more of them into operation and his velocity increased sharply. As he watched his speed mount, he never let his eyes lose track of the other silent reminders. It was an old practice and he was not warned. His acceleration steady, rockets firing in order, fuel flow proper, surface temperature changing rapidly, air-vacuum dropping steadily. Tubes recorded no overheating.

A glance at the photoelectric meters for the cells set in the surface revealed that it was now almost fully dark outside. Things were in perfect order.

For a half hour the great sphere continued its acceleration upwards. When finally the velocity dial registered what he wanted, the pilot cut the rockets entirely. Far in the recesses of the globe, automatic switches cut off the lead to each of the many rocket jets set near the surface and the explosive liquid fuel ceased to feed into the semi-atomic blasters. The sphere floated there. It was no longer in the Earth's atmosphere but in the realm of interplanetary space.

Sedgwick noted that gravity had ceased now that the ship was at rest.

He knew his velocity, even with the rockets off, would continue unhampered. The sphere had passed the escape-speed for Terra. It was in free space, the dials registered no pressure on the ball. To one side a dial registered a steady flow of heat, that would be the sun. To another side, a dial registered a slow flow of light. That would be the earth glow. The rest was darkness.

But the man was strapped in his seat and there was nothing loose in the basket, and, outside, at the curious feeling in his stomach and head and the indisputable evidence of the omniscient sensors, that was no evidence that the sphere was free of planetary gravity, free in the empty void between the planets.

From his photo-cells, the pilot knew what things were like outside. He flicked another button and cameras in the surface took a record of the scene, a record which would be much more accurate than anything he could see with the naked eye.

Sedgwick wondered whether man ever would see space with the bare eye. He glanced at another part of his controls and reflected that it was unlikely. Cosmic rays were bombarding the craft with mortifiable fury, unhampered by a hundred miles of atmosphere which alone kept life from being burned out of existence on earth. Here, he knew that only several shells of thick lead and steel, fifty feet of metal machinery in any direction, concentrations of chemicals and fuel, air supplies, food and swarms of water, kept the cosmic rays from reaching him and robbing the life from his flesh.

Protoplasm is a very delicate chemical compound, the thought suddenly occurred to Sedgwick, and it must be kept carefully sealed from raw force. It survived only within certain very narrow limits of temperature and under certain very restricted conditions of gases. Then he glanced again at the conditioning charts but all was well. Those limited conditions that kept his metal fish bowl fit for the fish were working to perfection. Metal and rubber, glasses and glass, electricity and silica, all hickies and strong negative, were harmonized here to keeping the little bit of water and carbon mush that was Edward Sedgwick liquident. The subjective term was "alive."

Still, this little bit of mush, this complex and unstable compound that men made, had built for itself the means wherewith it could master the antagonistic elements. Here was man, here within the full bubble of air in the midst of this greater bubble of aqua, barely dashing around in the domain hitherto exclusively reserved for planets and comets and suns. Mankind had usurped the privileges of stars and Sedgwick was the first to glimpse this concept.

He reset his rotors. His chair swivelled slightly. Rapidly his hands pressed a half dozen buttons. Acceleration started again. An integrator clicked out a set of numbers in its little glass face. They were set up on the controls and put to work.

He watched the glass pencils as the maneuver went into effect. The ship accelerated again. The direction was different. The sun was below him. The sphere was heading away from the sun. The earth too was behind.

Ahead was Mars. Not directly ahead but the sphere and the planet were both travelling towards the same point in space.

Sedgwick was not going all the way to Mars. He was going only part way there. Cameras would record further data and the globe would return to earth. Maybe it would go all the way to the red planet some day but that was only a dream.

For two days the sphere continued on its course. Acceleration of the rockets had been cut off after about four hours. At that time the metal ball was travelling at an unbelievable speed. Sedgwick could have made Mars in a week at that rate but he knew his limitations and he had his orders. He had been given this post because of his broad headed judgment, he did not deny that truth.

During those forty eight hours, Sedgwick had little to do besides check his controls. He was fed regularly by an automatic panel which every four hours flung pellets of food concentrate at him and the squirt of a water valve. Also he did naps when he felt tired. Automanic alarms would have awakened him if there had been need.

At one time, there had been a momentary flukering of gravitation data. There was nothing to be done for what was detected was a sizable body about fifty thousand miles away. The sizable body being undoubtedly an asteroid of perhaps ten miles diameter. No concern.

Only one other thing broke the monotony. One of a cluster of photo-sensitive cells on the sphere's skin went black. It was smashed. A meteor obviously, a tiny pellet of rock flying through space. Sedgwick wondered why none had not hit him; he had expected more trouble than that. Then he realized that after all space was really terribly empty and by odds it was possible a number of others had hit the surface where it would not be detected nor indeed make any difference.

The sphere was brought to a halt at the proper time and hung in space slowly revolving on its own axis. It was now about six million miles from Mars and there it would wait for ten hours or so until the red planet had been thoroughly photographed by the telescope cameras and recorded in other ways by other instruments.

The man could detect where it was by the glow registering on the surface cell clusters. He could tell where it was by the gravitational directives functioning on the panel. He could tell exactly its mass and speed, his own speed, the Earth's, the sun's and every other major body's. He knew what their orbits were and what was to be done to bring the ship back to Earth.

He laughed to himself briefly when the thoughts struck him that he had once been in space almost three days and yet had not set eyes on the stars. It struck him that that was probably the longest such period away from a sight of the stars that he had ever been in his life. And yet, actually, he was surrounded by them!

As he was setting the dials to bring the ship back in an Earth-bound orbit, another gravitational recorder started functioning. A body about ten thousand miles away, a small body. Presumably another wandering asteroid. They should be frequent here even though this was inside the orbit of

Mars. Many asteroids crossed that orbit even though the majority stayed between Mars and Jupiter.

Carefully Sedgwick computed the orbit of the new body, now that it would pass well beyond him and paid no further attention. It was not until other bodies were accelerating the sphere back towards the Earth that he noticed that his original calculation on the mass unusual body was in error. Apparently the mass would pass increasingly close to where the sphere was. Panicked over the original mistake, which should have been impossible, he speeded up the reader a bit and shifted the globe slightly. It should be sufficient to put distance between the asteroid and the ball.

A bit later he noticed that mistake had again occurred. The asteroid was still heading for an intersection with the sphere. Under the tiny planet had changed its orbit, which was impossible, or somehow the wires and mechanisms of the outside structure were damaged. That was possible and it was also dreadfully serious. A motor perhaps? It might have broken itself into something and created a short circuit somewhere. The shafts showed no such thing though and it was unlikely that any single motor could have broken all the shafts.

Again he shifted the sphere's course and this time he watched the dials registering the asteroid. Sure enough the gravitational influences altered slowly and surely to bring the foreign body's shift into a new orbit that would keep it on an intersection with the sphere.

Then Sedgwick noticed something else. That the speed of the asteroid had altered, had accelerated. If the initial velocity of the little metal wonder had been the same, it would not have mattered much where it headed. The velocity of the globe was so much greater and was quite capable of capturing any natural body. But the speed of the strange body had altered; it had speeded up and it had not lost anything of the original distance between them. In fact the man now realized that it was accelerating even more than his sphere and was steadily closing the gap!

This was no asteroid. He was sure of that now. Giddily sure of it and he wondered at himself for his own foolishness. Then with a start he recognized his own creation. It was that calmness that settled over him with every stress and emergency. This then was a serious crisis.

What was this body? He dared not think and yet he knew he must. There were one conclusion and one only. No comet, no asteroid, no meteor could change its orbit. No lifeless body could speed itself up and so deliberately and consistently keep its path in space so that it would overtake and meet up with the sphere no matter what shift the latter made. This was, this could only be, an artificially created mass, an intelligently directed body, another space travelling vehicle for an intelligent race?

But from where? From Earth never. From Mars then? Maybe. It was a likely possibility. He had approached Mars. He had hung for a while in space surveying it. Could it be that Mars was protected? That Mars was patrolled? This something was coming to investigate him?

Sedgwick had no need to allow that. He knew several things. One, that he had no means of communicating with another space sphere. Two, that

his first duty was to bring back his sphere safe and intact with all its records unimpaired. Then, that if alien hands or alien machines tried to pry into his craft, it would almost certainly accomplish ruin and his death.

Therefore Sedgwick ran. Rapidly he extricated, rocketing at first as the increasing velocity and acceleration would permit. And as his speed increased, he kept refiguring his orbits so as to cut his path to Earth shorter and shorter.

As the sphere ran, so did the pursuer. When one put on a burst of speed, so did the other. Steadily the distance between the two bodies grew less. Hours were by and the sphere was blurring along at maximum possible acceleration. Now the alien body was close, was within a mile or so and still gaining.

Sedgwick was able to determine even things about the enigma. His regimen were delicate enough to detect things they could not while it was far away. The other thing was several times larger than the globe, it was egg-shaped, and it had a high reflecting scale such as polished metal would have.

It was obvious that the pursuer must be gotten rid of within the next hour or all would be lost anyway. At this speed of travel, he would have to start decelerating soon or else the sphere would overshoot the Earth and never return. There was no dodging or outrunning the other possible any more. Now he would have to fight it.

The ship had guns Sedgwick had laughed at the Commission when they had installed them. He had said that they could never expect to use them and now he knew that whoever it was on the Commission that had ordered them had had more foresight than anyone.

The guns were six in number, two at the poles and four along the equator. They did not project from the surface. Only the pit of their barrels showed and they were covered with sliding metal doors when not in use. They were naval ordnance, built by automatic feeds, fired by the rocket fuel and bursting shells filled with terrifically powerful explosives.

The recoil of a gun firing was taken up by automatic discharge of a blank shot from the gun on the opposite side of the sphere. In this way the course of the globe was not altered by the recoil.

Sedgwick shifted the sphere slightly until one of his pulse guns was aimed at the pursuer. Then he waited. This shot had to be effective. He dived not now nor blunder,

Steadily the sphere moved on towards Earth and steadily the strange pursuer followed, closer and closer. It narrowed the distance from a mile to a half mile. Sedgwick was impelled to fire but restrained himself. Through his head floated the old Bunker 111 injunction about waiting for the whites of their eyes. That shot had to be good. He knew nothing of the armament of the mysterious follower, therefore his best shot would have to be the deciding one.

Now he watched the disk closely. The giant egg was a few hundred yards away. His finger rested on the firing button. For a second it hesitated and then pressed down.

He never noticed the shock for it was counterbalanced. But he saw the meter of the gun rapidly check off shots as shells did one after another into the breach and were blazed off point-blank at the strange mass. One, two, three, four, five. . . .

Then suddenly the sphere received a blow as if a giant bat had swooped and connected with it. The pilot's chair swayed wildly about on its gimbals and all the instruments vibrated madly. When it had steadied again, Sedgwick saw that the sphere was hurtling away from the scene of the shooting. The dials registered the terrific explosion that must have taken place. The concussion had hurled the globe off its course.

Where there had been a gravitational force manifesting close by, now there was none. The pursuer was no more. It must have blown to smithereens when the shells hit it.

Sedgwick rapidly recalculated his course and shot off homeward towards the earth. A number of photo cells were blank on the explosion side; several rocket tubes were out of commission and other things connected with that side were away. The sphere, however, was entirely under control and quite navigable.

Landing blind was not so hard as he had only to follow the radio beam. The radio had stopped functioning as soon as he had left the earth as had been predicted and it had started again when the sphere successfully coasted so within five miles of the surface. The great ball slid gently on its rockets into the place of its origin and came to rest.

When Sedgwick had crawled out through the exit tube and had shaken himself free from the stiffness of his muscles and the hands of the small crowd, he realized that it was night and the stars were shining down. That was what held his attention the longest, that and the great glow of raw black fire that was smeared over the sphere's side when the unseen pursuer exploded.

# Rhythm of the Spheres

by A. Merritt

*A. Merritt was a poet before he was a novelist, and that fact is clearly demonstrated in this unusual short story. It is unusual for the case of science fiction, for Merritt would surely have been likely to write about it only pulp magazine formulas; and it is unusual for Merritt himself, for all a rule he did not write either short poems or science fiction. This is both. It is a short story, one of his beautiful, and it is science fiction written at the specific request of a group of amateur fans. It is no sf, also poetry. The emphasis of the poem and not against the audience and has nearly a literary theme . . . and he does a most robust justice.*

**N**IKODNY, the Russian, sat in his laboratory. Nikodny's laboratory was a full mile under earth. It was one of a hundred caverns, some small and some vast, cut out of the living rock. It was a realm of which he was sole ruler. In certain caverns garlands of small trees stood; and in other little masses roared and raged as the ocean roared and raged over earth, and there was a cavern in which orange perpetual dawn, deep, over big beds and wisps and roses; and another in which crimson sunsets baptized in the blood of slain dry drowned and died and were born again behind the sparkling curtains of the aurora.

And there was one cavern ten miles from side to side in which great flowering trees and trees which bore fruits unknown to man for many generations. Over this great orchard one yellow sunlike orb shone, and daily trailed veils of rain upon the trees and miniature thunder drummed at Nikodny's windowing.

Nikodny was a poet—the last poet. He did not write his poems in words but in colors, sounds, and visions made material. Also, he was a great scientist—the greatest in his popular field. Thirty years before, Russia's Senate Council had debated whether to grant him the leave of absence he had asked, or to destroy him. They knew him to be unorthodox. How deadly as they did not know, also after much deliberation, they would not have released him. It must be remembered that of all nations, Russia then was the most mechanized, most robot-ridden.

Nikodny did not hate mechanization. He was indifferent to it. Being only intelligent he hated nothing. Also was indifferent to the whole civilization man had developed and unto which he had been born. He had no

feeling of kinship to humanity. Outwardly, in body, he belonged to the species. Not so in mind. Like Leech, a thousand years before, he considered mankind a sorry race of half monkeys, meant upon suicide. Now and then, out of the sea of human mediocrity, a wave uplifted that held for a moment a light from the sun of truth—but soon it sank back and the light was gone. Quenched in the sea of stupidity. He knew that he was one of those waves.

He had gone, and he had been lost to sight by all. In a few years he was forgotten. Unknown and under another name, he had entered America and secured rights to a thousand acres in what of old had been called Westchester. He had picked this place because investigation had revealed to him that of ten hundred on this planet it was most free from danger of earthquake or similar seismic disturbance.

The man who owned it had been whimsical; possibly an aviator—like Naroday, although Naroday would never have thought of himself at that. At any rate, instead of an angled house of glass such as the thirtieth century built, this man had reconstructed a rambling old stone house of the nineteenth century. Few people lived upon the open land in those days, and they had withdrawn into the confines of the city-state.

New York, swollen by its needs of years, was a fat belly of mankind well many miles away. The land around the house was forest-covered.

A week after Naroday had taken the house, the men in front of it had melted away leaving a three acre, arid field. It was not as though they had been cut, but as though they had been dissolved. Late that night a great airship had appeared upon this field—stealthily, as though it had blisked out of another dimension. It was rocket-shaped but rounded. And immediately a fog had fallen upon airship and house, hiding them. Within the fog, if one could have seen, was a wide tunnel leading from the airship's door to the door of the house.

And out of the airship came swathed figures, ten of them, who walked along that tunnel, were met by Naroday and the door of the old house closed on them.

A little later they returned, Naroday with them, and out of an opened hatch of the airship rolled a small flat car on which was a skein of crystal cones, ranging around each other in a central cone some four feet high. The cones were upon a thick base of some glassy material in which was imprinted a rich, green emblem.

The rays did not penetrate that which held it, but it seemed constantly seeking, with suggestion of prodigious force, to escape. For hours the strange thick fog held. Tawdry sticks up in the far reaches of the stratosphere, a faintly sparkling cloud grew, like a condensation of cosmic dust.

And just before dawn the rock of the hill behind the house melted away, like a curtain that had covered a great tunnel. Five of the men came out of the house and went into the airship. It lifted silently from the ground, slipped into the aperture and vanished. There was a whispering sound, and when it had died away the breast of the hill was whole again.

The neck had been drawn together like a closing curtain and bounden studded it as before. That the breast was now slightly concave where before it had been convex, none would have noticed.

For two weeks the sparkling cloud was observed far up in the stratosphere, was commented upon daily, and then was seen no more. Nasady's creams were finished.

Half of the rock from which they had been hollowed had gone with that sparkling cloud. The baluster, reduced to its primal form of energy, was seen in blocks of the various material that had supported the rooms, and within them it moved at restlessly and always with the same vag gittion of prodigious force. And it was there, indefinitely potent, from it came the energy that made the little sun and moon, and activated the various architectures that regulated pressure in the caverns, supplied the air, created the rain, and made of Nasady's realm a mile deep under earth the Paradise of poetry, of music, of color and of form which he had conceived in his brain and with the aid of those ten others had caused to be.

Now of the ten there is no need to speak further. Nasady was the Master, but three, like him, were Russians, two were Chinese; of the remaining five, three were women—one German in ancestry, one Belgian, one an Armenian; a Hindu who traced his descent from the line of Gattanee; a Jew who traced his from Solomon.

All were one with Nasady in indifference to the world, each with him in his viewpoint on life, and each and all lived in his or her own Eden among the hundred caverns except when it interested them to work with each other. Time meant nothing to them. Their researches and discoveries were solely for their own uses and enjoyment. If they had given them to the outer world they would only have been ammunition for warfare either between men upon Earth or Earth against some other planet.

Why hasten humanity's suicide? Not that they would have felt regret at the eclipse of humanity. But why trouble to expedite it? Time meant nothing to them, because they could live as long as they desired—barring weakness. And whilst there was rock in the world, Nasady could convert it into energy to maintain his Paradise—or to create others.

The old house began to crack and crumble. It fell—much more quickly than the elements could have brought about its destruction. Then trees grew among the ruins of its foundations; and the field that had been so vigorously cleared was overgrown with trees. The land became a wood in a few short years, silent except for the roar of an occasional rocket passing over it and the songs of birds which had found there a sanctuary.

Far down down in earth, within the caverns, there were music and song and mirth and beauty. Counter synaphs circled under the little moons. Flutes piped. There was revelry of antique harvester under the small suns. Grapes grew and ripened, were pressed, and red and purple wines were drunk by Bacchantes who fell at last asleep in the arms of fauns and satyrs. Thickets danced under the pale moon-bows, and sometimes Centaurs wheeled

and took infinite measures beneath them to the drum of their hands upon the mossy floor. The old Lark lived again.

Narodny lived to druzeke Alexander rising to Thais among the splendors of conquered Persepolis; and he heard the crackling of the flames that at the whim of the war-gods destroyed it. He watched the siege of Troy and counted with Homer the Achaeans ships drawn up on the strand before Troy's walls; or saw with Herodotus the tribes that marched behind Xerxes—the Carians in their skins of skin with their bows of cane, the Ethiopians in their skins of leopards with spears of antelope horn, with phalluses made hard by fire; the Thracians with the heads of lions upon their heads, the Mochans who wore helmets made of wood and the Celahans who wore the skulls of men.

For him the Eleusinian and the Ossian mysteries were re-created, and he watched the women of Thrace tear to fragments Orpheus, the first great musician. At his will, he could see and tell the Empire of the Aztecs, the Empire of the Incas; or beloved Caesar slain in Rome's Senate; or the archers at Agincourt; or the Americans in Bellona's Wood. Whatever man had written—whether poet, historian, philosopher or scientist—the strangely shaped mechanisms could bring before him, changing the words into phantom real as though living.

He was the last and greatest of the poets—but also he was the last and greatest of the musicians. He could bring back the songs of ancient Egypt, or the choirs of more ancient Ur. The songs that came from Moesovargashky's soul of Mother Earth, the harmonies of Beethoven's deaf brain or the chants and rhapsodies from the heart of Chopin. He could do more than restore the music of the past. He was master of sound.

To him, the music of the spheres was real. He could take the sun of the stars and planets and weave them into symphonies. Or convert the sun's rays into golden tones no earthly orchestra had ever expected. And the silver music of the moon—the sweet music of the moon of spring, the full-throated music of the harvest moon, the little crystalline music of the winter moon with its arpeggios of matrons—he could weave into strains such as no human ear had ever heard.

So Narodny, the last and greatest of poets, the last and greatest of musicians, the last and greatest of artists—and in his sober way, the greatest of scientists, lived with the sun at his chosen in his cavern. And, with charm, he corrugated the surface of the earth and all who dwelt upon it to a degree I tell—

Unless something happening there might upset his Paradise!

As one of the possibility of that danger, among his mechanisms were those which brought to eyes and ears news of what was happening on earth's surface. Now and then, they amused themselves with these.

It so happened that on that night when the Ruler of Robots had experimented with a new variety of ray—a space-warper—Narodny had been weaving the rays of Moon, Jupiter and Saturn into Beethoven's Moonlight Symphony. The moon was a four day crescent, Jupiter was at one stage,

and Saturn hung like a pendant below the low Shentry Orion would strike across the Heavens and bright Regulus and red Aldebaran, the Eye of the Bull, would furnish him with other chords of starlight resounding into sound.

Suddenly the weaves rhythms were rippled—flickerously. A devastating indescribable dissonance invaded the cavern. Beneath it, the nymphs who had been dancing languorously to the strains quavered like mere wraths in a sudden blist and were gone; the little moon flared, then ceased to glow. The tonal instruments were dead. And Nasodry was filled as though by a blow.

After a time the little moons began to glow again, but dimly; and from the tonal mechanisms came broken, crippled music. Nasodry stirred and sat up, his lean, high-cheeked face more Sunlike than ever. Every nerve was taut; then as they relaxed, agony crept along them. He sat, fighting the agony until he could summon help. He was answered by one of the Chinese.

Nasodry said, "It was a spatial disturbance, Lao. And it was like nothing I have ever known. The Ruler of Robots is performing a ray which to annihilate mankind."

Nasodry smiled. "I care nothing for mankind—yet I would not harm them, willingly. And it has occurred to me that I owe them, after all, a great debt. Except for them—I would not be. Also, it occurs to me that the robots have never produced a poet, a musician, an artist—" He laughed. "But it is in my mind that they are capable of one great art at least! We shall see."

Drows in the character of screens Nasodry laughed again.

He said, "Lao, is it that we have advanced so in these few years? Or that man has regressed? No, it is the curse of mechanization that destroys regeneration. You look, you, how easy is the problem of the robots. They begin as man-made machines. Mathematical, shallow, insatiable to any emotion. So was primal matter of which all on earth are made, rock and water, tree and grass, metal, animal, fish, worm, and men. But somewhere, somehow, something was added to this primal matter, combined with it—call it. It was what we call life. And life is consciousness. And therefore logically conscious. Life establishes its rhythms—and yet rhythms being different in rock and crystal, metal, fish, and man—we have these varying things.

"Well, it seems that life has begun to establish its rhythm in the robots. Consciousness has touched them. The proof? They have established the idea of common identity—group consciousness. That in itself involves emotion. But they have gone further. They have attained the instinct of self-preservation. They are allied mankind will rush against them. And this, my wise friend, instills fear—fear of extinction. And fear engenders anger, hatred, arrogance—and many other things. The robots, in short, have become emotional to a degree. And therefore vulnerable to whatever may amplify and control their emotions. They are no longer mechanisms.

So, Lao, I have in mind an experiment that will provide me study and

movement through many years. Originally, the robots are the children of mathematics. I ask—so what a mathematician most closely related? I answer—to rhythm—is moved—to search which case to the 7th degree the rhythms to which they will respond. Both mathematically and emotionally."

Lao said: "The next sequence?"

Naredy answered: "Exactly. But we must have a few robots with which to experiment. To do that means to dislodge the upper gate. But that is nothing. Tell Mercury and Euphrasie to do it. Not a ship and bring it here. Bring it down gently. You will have to kill the men in it, of course, but do it mercifully. Then let them bring me the robots. Use the green flame on one or two—the rest will follow, I'll warrant you."

The hill behind where the old house had stood trembled. A circle of pale green light gleamed on its breast. It dimmed and where it had been was the black mouth of a tunnel. An airship, half broken, half wrecked, making its way to New York, abruptly descended, circled, fell gently, like a moth, close to the yawning mouth of the tunnel.

Its door opened, and out came two men, pilots, caroling. There was a last sigh from the tunnel's mouth and a silvery misty cloud sped from it, over the pilots and straight through the opened door. The pilots crumpled to the ground. In the airship half a dozen other men, three of the robots, slumped to the floor, unclad, and died.

There was a full score robots in the ship. They stood, looking at the dead men and at each other. One of the tunnel came two figures swathed in metallic glimmering robes. They entered the ship. One said: "Robots, assemble."

The metal men stood, motionless. Then one sent out a shrill call. From all parts of the ship the metal men moved. They gathered behind the one who had sent the call. They stood behind him, waiting.

In the hand of one of those who had come from the tunnel was what might have been an antique flash light. From it sped a thin green flame. It struck the foremost robot on the head, sliced down from the head to the base of the trunk. Another slice, and the green flame cut two from side to side. He fell, sliced by that flame into four parts. The four parts lay, inert, as their metal, upon the floor of the compartment.

One of the shrouded figures said: "Do you want further demonstration—or will you follow us?"

The robots put flesh together; whispered. Then one said: "We will follow."

They marched into the tunnel, the robes making no resistance nor effort to escape. They came to a place whose floor sank with them until it had reached the visitors. The machine man still went doubtfully. Was it because of curiosity mixed with the fear for these men whose bodies could be broken so easily by one blow of the metal appendages that served them for arms? Perhaps.

They came to the cavern where Naredy and the others waited there,

Murisoff led them in and halted them. These were the robots used in the flying ships—their heads cylindrical, four arm appendages, legs implemented, torso slender. The robots, it should be understood, were differentiated in shape according to their occupations. Narodny said: "Welcome, robots! Who is your leader?"

One answered: "We have no leaders. We act as one."

Narodny laughed: "Yet by speaking for them you have shown yourself the leader. Step closer. Do not let—go!"

The robot said: "We feel no fear. Why should we? Even if you should destroy us who are here, you cannot destroy the billions of us outside. Nor can you breed fast enough, because men soon enough, to cope with us who enter into life strong and complete from the beginning."

He stalked an appendage toward Narodny and there was contempt in the gesture. But before he could draw a buck a bracelet of green flame encircled it at the shoulder. It had darted like a thrown loop from something in Narodny's hand. The robot's arm dropped clinging to the floor, clearly severed. The robot stared at it unheedingly, threw forward his other three arms to pick it up. Again the green flame encircled also his legs above the second joints. The robot crumpled and pushed forward, crying in high-pitched shrill tones to the others.

Swiftly the green flame played among them. Legsless, armless, some dislocated, all the robots fell except two.

"You will be enough," said Narodny. "But they will not need arms—only feet."

The flashing green bracelets encircled the appendages and encased them. The pair were mashed away. The bodies of the others were taken apart, sliced, and under Narodny's direction curious experiments were made. Above him in the cavern, strange chords, unfamiliar progressions shattering spangles, and intense vibrations of sound that could be felt but not heard by the human ear.

And finally this last deep vibration burst into bearing as a vast dome, bounded up and up into swift ringing tempest of crystalline, brittle notes, and still ascending passed into shrill high piping, and enclosed again reflected as had the prelude to the closing. And thence it echoed back, the piping and the crystalline storm reversed, into the dome and the silence—thus back and up.

And the bodies of the broken robots began to quiver, to tremble, as though every atom within them were dancing in ever increasing, rhythmic motion. Up rushed the music; and down—again and again. It ended abruptly in mid flight with one crashing note,

The broken bodies ceased their quivering. Tiny star-shaped cracks appeared in their metal. Once more the note resounded and the cracks widened. The metal splintered.

Narodny said: "Well, there is the frequency for the rhythm of our robots. The destructive union. I hope for the sake of the world outside it is not

also the rhythm of many of their buildings and bridges. But, after all, in any war there must be casualties on both sides."

Lan said: "Earth will be an extraordinary spectacle—a plaintive phenomenon, for a few days."

Narodny said: "It is going to be an extraordinarily uncomfortable Earth for a few days, and without doubt many will die and more go mad. But is there any other way?"

There was no answer. He said: "Bring in the two robots."

They brought them in.

Narodny said: "Robots—were there ever any of you who could picture?" They answered: "What is picture?"

Narodny laughed: "Never mind. Have you ever sung—such music—planted? Have you ever drawn well?"

One robot said with cold irony: "Dreamed? No—for we do not sleep. We leave all that to men. It is why we have conquered them."

Masuday said, almost gently: "Not yet, robot. Have you ever—danced? No? It is an art you are about to learn."

The unheard note began, crooked up and through the temple and away and back again. And up and down—and up and down, though not so loudly as before. And suddenly the feet of the robots began to move, to shuffle. Their leg joints beat; their bodies, panged. The note seemed to move now here and now there about the chamber, and always, following it, grotesquely, like huge metal marionettes, they followed it. The music ended in the crashing note. And it was as though every vibrating atom of the robot bodies had met with some insurmountable obstruction. Their bodies quivered and from their voice mechanisms came a shank that was a hideous blend of machine and life. Once more the drone, and once more and once more and then, again, the abrupt stop.

There was a brittle crackling all over the cracked heads, all over the bodies. The red draped splinterings appeared. Once again the drone—but the two robots moved, unceasingly. For through the complicated mechanisms which under their carapaces maintained them were similar splinterings.

The robots were dead!

Narodny said: "By tomorrow we can amplify the sonor to make it effective in a 100 mile circle. We will use the upper cavern, of course. It means we must take the ship out again. In these days, Marifot, you should be able to cover the other continents. See to it that the ship is completely proof against the vibrations. To much. We must act quickly—before the robots can discover how to neutralize them."

It was exactly at noon the next day that over all North America a deep inexplicable droning wailed. It seemed to come not only from deep within earth, but from every side. It mounted rapidly through a tempest of ringing crystalline notes into a shrill piping and was gone. Then back it dashed born piping to droning, then up and out and down. Again and again. And over all North America the bodies of robots trapped in whatever they

were doing. Stopped—and then began to dance—to the thrashing noise of that weirdly fascinating music—that hypnotic rhythm which seemed to flow from the bowels of the earth.

They danced in the airships and spaces of those ships crushed before the human crew could gain control. They danced by the thousands in the streets of the cities—in grotesque rigmarole, in bizarre verbiage; with shuffle and hop and zig the robots danced while the people fled in panic and hundreds of them were crushed and died in those panics. In the great factories, and in the tunnels of the lesser cities, and in the mines—everywhere the sound was heard—and everywhere it was heard—the robots danced . . . to the piping of Nafodin, the best great poet . . . the last great musician.

And then came the crashing note—and over all the country the dance halted. And began again . . . and ceased . . . and began again. . . .

Until at last the cities, the lower tunnels of the lower levels, the mines, the factories, the houses, were littered with metal bodies shot through and through with star-shaped splinters.

In the cities the people crawled, not knowing what blow was to fall upon them . . . or rolled about in fear-maddened crowds, and many died.

Then suddenly the dreadful droning, the chattering tempest, the infernal high piping ended. And everywhere the people fell, sleeping among the dead robots, as though they had been strong in the power of hibernation, sapped of strength and then sharply relaxed.

And as though a bad-weathered tree Earth, America was deaf to cables, to all communication beyond the gigantic circle of sound.

But that night over all Europe the drone wrangled and Pisapek's robots began their dance of death . . . and when it had ended a strange and silent rocket slap that had hovered high above the stratosphere sped almost with the speed of light and hovered over Asia—and next day Africa heard the drone while the black answered it with his ten-ton—then South America heard it and last of all far Australia . . . and everywhere terror gripped the peoples and panic and madness took their grim toll.

Until of all the arctic animal heads that had feasted Earth and humanity there were a few score hundred left—escaped from the death dance through some variant in their constitution. And, awaking from that swift sleep, all over Earth those who had feared and hated the robots and their slavery rose against those who had favored the metal domination, and blasted the robot factories to dust.

Again the hill above the cavern opened, the strange torpedo ship blisked into sight like a ghost, as silently as a ghost floated into the hill and the rocks closed behind it.

Nursery and the others stood before the gigantic television screen, looking upon a series of city after city, country after country, over all Earth's surface. Lao, the Chinese, said: "Many men died, but many are left. And

the Rules of Robots is no more. They may not understand—but to them it was worth it."

Nasodny mused: "It drives home the lesson—what man does not pay for, he values little."

And Nasodny shook his head, doubtfully. But soon harmonies were swelling through the great oases of the orchards, and nymphs and fauns dancing under the fragrant blossoming trees—and the world again forgotten by Nasodny . . .

# Madness of the Dust

by R. F. Staral

*Men who are isolated in lonely places can and do crack up. At least, for them, the radio remains their sole sort of communication with their home base. But what of the man isolated in some mining or exploration base or some other more desolate world? What if the radio would be either impossible or wholly non-existent, where distances were not a matter of a few days' truck across mountains or plains? R. F. Staral, who enjoyed great popularity in the early days of science fiction, is brought back to modern prose with this unusual episode of Mars.*

JOHN FARRINGTON looked out of a metal-fringed, thick glass window at a hopeless red landscape, unrelieved by mountain or lake or tree. No sign of water, because the nearest of the green twenty-mile wide but shallow canals was over a hundred miles away. No sight of blue sky, but a vague reddish void that on rare days darkened to a purplish black, where sometimes the brightness of the stars could be seen hours before the setting of the small but fiercely brilliant sun.

The sun was not fiercely brilliant now. High overhead it rode, but it was only a blob of red in a red sky, and ever higher whirled the clouds of red dust, driven by the fierce autumn wind of Mars. Endless till, whirling columns of dust walked across the desert's face. Broad, viciously driven lines of dust swept over the horizon and buried themselves upon the lonely sandbag post, as if they would demolish it and scatter the alienating sections far and wide, but the shock of the wind's onslaught was light. Lacking the weight of a dense atmosphere, the Martian storm, for all of its violence, was feeble compared to terrestrial standards. It failed to lift the Indians, who continued to pile bags of horizon, a powerful catalytic agent that marsh in demand on Earth, on the levelling platform as far as it was recessed from the underground solitudes, which excreted the horizon direct from the air body. Consequently magnified by the light and shadow distortion of the haze, they plodded solidly about their tasks in the gathering dusk. Occasionally one of them came close enough to the window for Farrington to see the dust on fat, blabbery scales covering arms, legs and back.

There was an apologetic drumming noise in the room behind the trader. It was Nana. She stood uncertainly beside the double door through which

she had let herself in—herself, and a blast of cold. A dry cold—almost the cold of waterless space.

"What is it, Niss?" the man asked sharply.

She looked at him with the weariness of her great, single eye from which the dark protective lids were settling away in transplanted folds. In a few moments the deathlike asphyxiation of her chest subsided, and from it came sounds—sounds that had warded the terrestrial disasters; a Miss Columbia, back in 1992. To Farnington the sounds sounded menacing. Niss was speaking in the baneful dialect used by the Libating demons of Mars.

"Get your ugly face out of here!" he shouted. "I'll call you when I want you to clean up."

She turned placidly to go, gentle, uncomplaining slave that she was. Farnington was struck with quick compunction. He called her back and handed her an orange—that strange and foreign fruit, which, above all other importations from the equivalent Earth, the Martians craved. Niss paused upon the gift, traced it into her huge, purple-spotted nose, and with many gurgles and snorts of delight she crushed its lush sweetness, let the juice trickle slowly and deliciously down her galore, the whale she bosoored and passed from her drawn-head diaphragm.

"I don't know what's getting into me," Farnington thought. "I'm getting smaller every day. It's lucky these fellows are so goodnatured. When I leaped a rock at old Niss yesterday, he just let it bounce off and crossed his could have broken me in two with those steely shovel claws of his."

He put his hands to his temples. "Wonder what's the matter anyway. My head feels like I had a hoop of steel around it. I can't eat; I can't sleep. My eyes feel like they're burning."

He drew a large glass of water from the tank in the corner of the room and gulped it down. He refilled the glass and drank again. Although he filled himself to repletion, he could not shake the thorn that constantly pained him. Suddenly he dropped the glass and it broke on the stone floor—the second that day. Dizzily he hurried to his cot. He tried about on it, but soon he dropped off to sleep. When he awoke it was almost night. The wind was gone and stars were brilliant in the purplish black heavens. The Martian laborers had left—gone to their mysterious sub-martian caves, where they lived their half-reptilian lives.

"Don't know what I'm going to do if those spells keep up," said the trader to himself soberly. "Maybe I'd better ask for aid."

The thought galled him. He remembered the eagerness with which he had asked for this post—the most dangerous of all the colonizing points in the far-flung solar system. It had been quickly discovered that the inner sphere of Mars was insidiously hostile to terrestrial life. In the early days many a colonist had been returned, writhing in the throes of a strange malady—a malady in which they haddled of 'The Dust—The Dust. A madness in which they sought to turn their dear to them.

Farnington had only laughed when Ellaron, Old Ellaron, head of the Planetary Civil Service, warned him of dangers at the Bonum post.

"It's got some mighty good men, and not all of them recovered," Old

Elbivore and seriously. "Of course the salary is high on the Martian job, but when you consider the hazards it's not so much. They have to pay a high salary to get a white man to take the job at all. Why not let me fit you out with a nice post on Venus? The City of the Cascades is becoming quite a health resort, and you meet no end of smart people there."

"No," the young engineer said positively, "I don't care to roll around with a lot of professional traders on a sterilized planet. Venus is too hot for a white man to get ahead on. Besides, you know how every purple-faced clerk on Earth wants to be sent to Venus, and the salaries are accordingly. I couldn't marry Alberda on the salary they pay."

"Don't worry about that, my dear Jack," smiled Elbivore. "You know that the man who marries my daughter need not to worry about money. Hm—"

"Well, if I do, I will!" Farrington interrupted. "Unless I can make a stake I won't feel right about marrying anybody. I want the Bartram post. I know I'll be able to fill my quota, and with the bonus still being me, I'll be able to offer Alberda a safe future."

"I admire your spirit," said Elbivore truly. "I hope you hold out long enough to get back safe. Well, go ahead and get ready to start."

Farrington smiled weakly at the quizzical spirit of his youth. Ha youth! Why, that was only six months ago, Earth time, just six months, and he was still young. Only twenty-five, but it seemed more. Well, he'd give something to be on that Turkish bath of a Venus right now, or better yet at a certain bend of a sandy creek back home in Texas.

It occurred to him that in six months his schedule called for completion of his quota. He pressed one of a row of buttons on his working desk. Instantly a marble later a trapdoor opened, and one of the Martian checkers climbed up. He was a youngster himself, and patiently waiting.

"Weight? Weight ship—got 'em?" Farrington addressed him eagerly.

The daphengon stated, stared placidly. Quickly the creature produced the receipts printed by automatic weighing machines, giving the total for each day. The machines were specially designed to give Earth weights on Mars.

With a joyful thrill Farrington read the figures—127 tons. His quota was only 120 tons. On the instant his mood changed. He felt again the pressure on his temples, the burning in his eyes. He saw the interior of the room through a red haze—red dust.

"Why didn't you tell me?" he roared. He leaped upon the astonished Martian, beat the unresisting creature furiously upon its leather, blubber-blister soles. The protesting, wheeling noise from the daphengon only increased his rage. He pounded the oval appendage of the Martian with his fists until the room was filled as by the low bellowing of thunder. And then of a sudden the room was alive with Martians. Anxiously, clairvoyantly they picked up the traces. Terrestrial from his victim and carried the latter to bed. Conscious of their helpless concern, Farrington was filled with hate for them, kicked furiously at their ugly, kindly faces. He hated them for their ugliness, their low organization. He hated them for their rank, oily odor.

He hated also those aristocratic ruling Martians, living idly in their polished cities near the canals, living on the work and the brains of doctors centuries ago dead, condescending to tangle with the young, brain planet to reward only for the sake of their pretties. He hated them most of all in refusing direct contact with the Terreneish, transacting all business through their slaves. He hated . . .

He found that he hated everybody—Jennett, old Ellsworth, Alfreda each No, he didn't hate her, but he hated . . . God! For the strength to kill these beasts!

Water was pressed to his lips. He drank greedily, in long, deep draughts. When the glass was empty he mouthed for more. It was green to him. He lay calcinated. Gradually he drifted to sleep. The last sound he heard was the rustling whispers of his nerves. His last thought was:

"It's got me! It's got me! The Devil Madness has got me!"

When he awoke again it was still night, and the long, single room of the trading building was dimly lighted by the mellow glow of a single ion tube. The slaves were all gone except Nissa who, reasonably supposing him, sat on the floor. His head was reasonably clear again, but he dared not move for fear of bringing on another fit of rage before he could do what had to be done. He caught Nissa's eye.

"Lift me—" he commanded guardedly, "lift me to radio!" He shot his eyes again. She lifted him, cot and all, up from down below, the simple panel of the automatic transmitter. He reached for a central dial, turned it to the call of his operating base in Revel. Overhead there was a subdued grinding as the automatically controlled directional antenna turned to the proper position. A bell jangled musically, a signal that the course where was going out.

"Hello Rio! Hello! Hello Rio!" he said in ordinary conversational tones. He did not wait for a reply, knowing that minutes must pass before his message could reach the Earth, and minutes more before the answer, sped along at the rate of over 186,000 miles a second, could come back to him. So he gave the whole of his message at one time:

"This is John Barrington, Planetary Civil Service 4011199, situated at Boron post, Mars, reporting. We have completed our quota of 120 tons and are ready for relief. Include in next trade shipment 100 cases of data loops and 40 barrels powdered honey. Protect shipment in forward holds before against interstellar cold—the food committee here is complaining. Please hurry relief. We have vegans every day, the diet is bad. For God's sake hurry, before I go crazy!"

Almost instantly there came a reply from the receiver, slightly luminous globe above the panel:

"Back up, Jack old boy! I'll be with you by daylight. Fix her on the way a month, and I'll soon be docking your dirty little moon. The old bull certainly is dusty; I couldn't see any of the canals or other markings for days on account of the dust."

"Is a yes, Sleep?" exclaimed the sick man. "By Golly! It is! Boys, Steve, I'm sure glad you're coming—you're sure the best friend I've got."

"Dear friend, I hope, and most persistent rival. Paul is, old boy, I care less because Alfreda trusted. She was warned by some of your queen message. She was our, you understand, who have papers causing me to command the finest Venetian horses, to take a rickety old bulk to this miserable hole and bring you home. That's what hopeless love will do to a man!"

Farrington put his hand to his temples. They were thudding again. With quick, nervous movements he took off the covers off him. With an enormous effort of will power he tried to keep his voice from shaking. He said slowly:

"Yes, I guess you're persistent all right. I guess you know when to take advantage of a man, when he's killing himself to make a home for a woman. I guess I can see you, those long months that I spent in this hell, hating yourself and turning her silly head with your sympathy—." The pressure in his temples was splitting his head—"When I'm able to get up again—I'll tear you—."

"DONG! NO! NO! NO!"

It was the beginning of the Rio, answering message.

"Reply to Borrows post: Relief ship has already been sent and at last report was 250,000 miles from Mars. It should be in path of directional radio beam. Ship carries freshly made specific for Dust Madness. Freighter will stop en route from Urusas and head bottom. Regarding complaint of frostbitten foot, Captain Skoglund reported—."

The voice droned on, but Farrington did not hear. With superhuman strength he was struggling with Nata, struggling to break away and vent his fury; to vent his fury on anything—the delicate instruments ranged around the room, for instance, in lieu of that still invincible friend whom his madness pictured as a betrayer. He subsided finally amid soft, accompanied by gulping sobs of sympathy from Nata as she paled him with water.

John Farrington sat in the half darkness of the old dispatch ship's white-painted hospital room. Through small pane of six inch thick glass he could catch a glimpse of the black sky with its great, visibility glowing stars. The faintly luminous walls of the stony enclosure, festooned at various points on the ship's hull, trailed past the window and off into infinity. Unpositively the old space ship was rocketing its best possible speed toward the Earth. Steve had mentioned that they were past the half way point and that soon the seeking tubes would be reversed. They were darting in a grand diagonal to a point of the Earth's orbit, mathematics, sly determined, that would bring the ship to its base near the mouth of the Amazon river.

Farrington felt much better. He had only a vague recollection of having been scared, screaming and fighting, by none of the stately crew in Steve's command. The Martians could not be induced to even approach the ship. They had an aversion, almost of loathing their planet, ever since the disastrous expedition of the year 2025, when hundreds of them, having been infected to embark for Earth, died of tuberculosis in the humid, dense atmosphere so foreign to them.

The specific had again passed its worth. In conjunction with the constantly purified air of the ship it had allayed almost completely the dreadful

attacks of homicidal mania which was for many years to prove an almost insuperable barrier to the permanent colonization of Mars.

The door opened and Steve came in.

"How's the patient this morning?" he smiled cheerily. "You look a little peckish, but you're getting back some healthy color just the same."

"I feel fine, Steve. It doesn't seem possible now that I was so wild a couple of weeks ago. It seems like a dream."

"It was certainly a wild dream. I got a laugh out of your chicken. You gave him such a beating on his diaphragm that he could hardly talk. He wasn't sore, though. You certainly put yourself at odds with the Martians when they got you."

"I hope you'll forget about the way I acted, Steve."

"It's all forgotten. It's all over, in fact. You've slept it off. I've used up all the specific, but I don't think you'll need any more. Just drink plenty of water; get the poison out of your system."

"It was useful while it lasted. You've saved my life in more ways than one, Steve. You've treated me as well as any doctor."

"It was that or nothing. They don't send out surgeons on these old tubs. If it wasn't that the underwriters insist upon it, they probably wouldn't even equip us with doctors."

They discussed the niggardly policies of the ship owners at length and with considerable warmth. Steve talked of the destruction of a planetoid that had been a pest to shipping, and after they had taken a meal they repaired to one of the empty storage holds that were temporarily fitted up for a gymnasium.

"I'm not as good today," said Steve. "My side kind of hurts, but a good work-out might help it."

They put on the gloves, and for ten minutes there was no talk; just the muffled clashing of padded fists, the rapid shuffle of feet, and soon, the panting of breaths.

All at once Steve sat down, and his face was pale. He held his hand to his abdomen.

"Sorry! Sorry, old man! I didn't mean to foul you!" Farnagion bent over his friend.

"You didn't foul me, Jack. You never touched me, but my belly sure is getting sensitive. It hurt like it was going to split open." His abdomen was in fact distended and the muscles were tense and hard.

"I guess it's the old appendicitis again," groaned Steve. "It's been bothering me, off and on, for years."

"Let me help you to the hospital cabin. You can sleep in my bed for a while."

"No—noah! Not yet, anyway! Just let me sit here for a while. I'll get better soon."

But it didn't get better. A half hour later Farnagion telephoned to the crew's quarters for help. Two Levantine prostitutes responded and carried the pale and perspiring shipmaster to the hospital. They were unscrupulous fellows, graduates of rough experiences on more than one remote planet.

"You'll have to take charge," Sireo said firmly. "You needn't bother about navigation. Krassin and Bolosman can handle the instruments all right, and they have their orders. But I guess you'll have to kind of watch me, I guess—I'm afraid—I'm going to—pass out. Alfie—Alfie, hold my hand!"

He was in a raging fever. His abdomen was still distended. His heart throbbed terrifically.

Farrington rushed to the adjoining radio room. Dialing the Rio station, he demanded preference over all other messages. Without waiting for acknowledgement he recited the symptoms of the shipmaster's attack, closing with a desperate appeal for help. Quickly he unplugged the transmitting and receiving units, and by means of crossover cords, set them up again by the bedside of the sick man.

"DONG NG-NG NG!"

"Rio station replying to Interplanetary L-4. Dr. Cawich has been called from the infirmary and he already has a printed copy of your message. He will advise you what to do."

A few seconds later the doctor spoke:

"Most likely your patient is suffering from a ruptured appendix. You're lucky if he doesn't get general peritonitis. It's a hell of a note to send out a man with a chronic case like his on a ship full of beans and no medical. Just the same you're going to use him if it possibly can be done.

"Look around and see if you can locate the standard surgical equipment chest. It'd better be there or some inspector is going to be in trouble. Open the wall cabinets until you find the steam sterilizer. Turn on the power, but don't forget to see that there's water in the boiler.

"While I'm talking to you you can wash your hands. For surgery your hands have to be not only washed, but scrubbed. Don't mind if you take off a little blod. Get them clean. Then you can rub 'em good with the bichloride of mercury. Fix it double strength. Open a tube of catgut, but don't take it out of the liquid until you need it."

The doctor paused to ascertain if Farrington was following him. In a few moments he continued:

"Put one of the morphine tablets in his mouth now so he'll be ready when you see. Since you can't perform an operation without assistance, and keep your hands sterile, keep a hand of chloromycetin handy. Wash your hands in it every little while as you work.

"You won't need many instruments. Pick out a good sharp scalpel. Find one with a 45-degree blade. Take a couple of forceps and one or two good hemostats. You may not need a hemostat, because you're not going to take that man's appendix out. The shape he's in I would hardly dare try that even here. All you've got to do is to make an incision and put in an intestinal tube. Understand that, just put in a drainage tube to let out the gas, and if you don't get in a lot of dirt, he'll probably recover."

On and on came the matter-of-fact directions. The doctor took each point pointedly, painstakingly instructing. Occasionally he paused to give Farrington a chance to ask questions. He told him how to locate the right spot, half way between the navel and a point on the right hip; told him to shave

the drawn tight skin; to wash it with the chlormercural, most deadly of all germicides, which would even penetrate tissues to destroy lurking unfriendly organisms.

And all that time Steve lay in shallow but persistent anesthesia. And all that time he thought of Alie—Alinda. He thought she was standing beside him—dressing him—dressing him the kiss that he yearned for more than all other kisses that were available to a handsome young master of Interplanetary Lines. His hallucinations shifted to the Caribbean. In a hydroplane they were skimming the crests of the dancing waves. She was smiling at him—

"Alie—Alie—I love you!"

Bursts of sweat stood on Farrington's forehead. He was physically spent. He felt a nausea usually associated with space sickness, though the decelerating effect of the atomic rockets provided a very acceptable substitute for the steady pull of gravity. If he could only sleep a little! But there lay his friend, utterly helpless. But now he his friend? He looked at the partly unclad form nervously. Certainly a magnificent body. Certainly a handsome head. Wonder if Alie had thought so? The pressure of his temples was back. Not so bad, though. He drank deeply, a couple of pints of water.

What was that? Not too far? "Be careful not to go too deeply," the ether-borne voice was saying. "Remember, you have a man's life in your hands.

"First you cut through the skin and fat. It won't bleed much. Next you come to the fascia, it's a sort of white, thick skin covering the muscles. Cut through it and you see the muscle. You can suture that and won't need to cut much. Just take the blade of a scalpel and separate the fibers. Then you're clear down to the peritoneum, and it's ticklish work for an amateur. You'll find a thin, tough membrane investing the viscera. Go very easy in cutting through. A slip of your knife and you might puncture an intestine and your man's done for, with all of the pus and corruption in the cavity. This is the way to do it: You take a little fold of the peritoneum with your fine forceps—"

On and on, endlessly. The room was oppressively silent. That steady pressure on his temples! His eyes burned. Oh, how he longed to rest! "A slip of the knife and he's done for!" Farrington battled against the horrible thought that dogged him. "Just a little slip of the knife" and Steve would stop moaning. "Alie—Alie, hold me!"

Forward, in their own quarters, were men. Stupid and brutal, to be sure, except for two busy navigators, but men. Farrington toyed with the thought of bringing one of them up not to perform the operation, but to watch him—Farrington. He laughed. How could they know? How could anyone know? Just a little slip of the knife, just a little slip, and those restless terrors would soon be stilled. Besides, it wouldn't do to let the men know the seriousness of the situation. Mutiny under such conditions was not impossible. The sweeping voids of space still offered rich possibilities to pirates who were hearty and bold.

"I can't do it! I can't do it!" Farrington cried aloud. "Just one little slip and I'll kill him!"

"... having removed the most of the gas," went on the voice, "instructed, "Notice the color of the intestines. If they are red, inflamed, as if they had been scalded, if the veins are congested, we may safely assume—"

There came a shriek. Farnington's despairing cry had gone over unbroken million miles of space, and had been heard by one who sat in Rio Grande's room in absolute silence. Her involuntary scream had been picked up and carried back at the speed of light, and now re echoed around the dingy cabin.

"Jack!" she wished. "Jack, you man! He saved poor life, Jack. He saved poor life for love of me. Don't fail me, Jack!"

"Take her out!" It was the voice of Dr. Carmelard to an assistant.

"Of course you're going to make a success of this, Farnington," he answered testily. "If you fail, Alfred will never speak to you again. She has sat here in torture for a long, weary hour. Take hold of yourself, Farnington!"

"Alfred! Alfred!" gasped the sick man.

"... the idea is to insert the tube so that it will permit free drainage—I would give him another morphine tablet now. Farnington—free drainage will permit nature to take care of the trouble. The ruptured appendix may leak, or at any rate be will be tilted over until we can operate on him at the hospital here with the high frequency apparatus, which will be perfectly safe. The thing to do is to keep him alive until then. See that the tube is well in past the peritoneum, and that it isn't obstructed. You saw the flap up as far as possible and put a stitch through the tube to hold it in place."

"Now, then, we're ready to start!"

Farnington seized a scalpel. The iron band around his head was intolerably tight. His eyes burned. He saw the form before him, sometimes in gray light, sometimes in red haze—Red Dart. Hammers were clanging on iron in his brain. Two voices disputed between hammer blows.

"No one will ever know," urged one. "A little slip, down in that gas and corruption—a little slip!" The voice was thirstily eager. It was determined; it was yearning. It hammered on his brain like a sledge on iron, with a bloodthirsty red eagerness—with a dry, cold eagerness. "Just a little slip—just a tiny little slip!"

"He is your friend!" insisted the other voice. It was a warm voice, and very, very weary. "He saved your life. He was sick, but he came to get you in this old tub because there was nobody else available. He could be comfortable and safe if he'd stayed home, but he came even before you asked for help, because he thought you might die if he didn't."

"Your friend!" mocked the snarling red voice. "While you were slaving in that hell hole for the sake of a woman, he was winning her from you. Your friend! Fool! Didn't you know he came because of her, not you?"

"If she loves him," insisted the other voice, still patient, weaker still, "there are plenty of other women. And if you love her, why kill him? After all, he saved you, no matter what his motives. And if you lose her, save him for her!"

"The first incident," came the message, "should be practically verified. Hold the skin firmly between two fingers, stitching it if not already tight—"

Farrington began.

The L-4 settled smoothly in the mooring pit at Rio. A dirty looking mechanic in fatigue uniform tightened the bolts holding the door tight to the tall, cylindrical sides. Through the thick glass the hand could be seen bobbing up and down as he secured the heavy screen. With a rapping of corroded hinges the income door swung open. A collapsible gangway slid automatically to the edge of the pit.

The little group at the pit peered anxiously into the semi-darkness of the interior. An elevator descended clinking. Farrington came to the door. He was deathly pale. He walked steadily. He stood aside and waited with his hand.

Four burly orderlies quickly entered the ship. They stepped into the elevator with Farrington. There was a long wait. More mechanics came out, squeezing over the paved surfaces of the ship by means of hand-ladders placed at convenient intervals. They connected lines of air-hose to the tank heads, coupled water pipes, replenished the atomic cartridges, replaced the badly worn nozzles of the rocket with new ones of artificially crystallized carbon. Boxes and barrels of air conditioning chemicals were trucked onto the ship. Tons of vitiated chemicals cascaded through veins into the reworking happens below. It was a scene of cheerful bustle and activity, such as occurred daily at numerous space-ports everywhere on the inhabitable planets of the solar system, but to the little group on the platform it was a scene of dread. They saw that dark door of uncertainty. They heard the clicking of the elevator.

It came. Almost instantly the four orderlies were in the door. They carried a stretcher. On it was Steve. He was grinning jovially and waved gaily to his friends. A girl detached herself from the group. She rushed to the side of the stretcher. She gave Steve a quick hug and a kiss, and then she ran up the ship. She had to climb a dirty metal ladder and thread her way through a tangle of pipes and tanks before she finally found Farrington. He was gazing sadly out of a port at a waving sea of tropical trees.

"Jack!" she said.

"Oh, hello, Alfreda!"

"Aren't you glad to see me?"

"Not now, you b----"

"I've something to tell you, Jack."

"I know it already," he said gruffly. "I hope you and Steve are very happy."

"We're all happy," she said, incomprehending, "and so relieved! When your radio went dead we didn't know what happened. We could only guess, and worry." She was laughing in glad release from the tension.

"I guess I had to mess up something," he explained. "I had a relapse of that d--- thing and was half crazy. I tore that transmitter to bits, after

I'd finished and got Simeon to bed. I can't just remember what happened.  
It was a nightmare!"

"Poor, dear Jack!" she murmured softly. "Aren't you going to kiss me?"  
"Why, why—I thought——"

"No more Marsian trips for you!" she chattered gaily. "The Board of  
Directors has voted to appoint you manager of the planetary port at  
Gibraltar. I'll live it there, and Jack, I'm so glad to think that our children  
will not have to be born and raised on foreign soil. I'm old fashioned that  
way. I'd never feel really at home except on the good old Earth."

# The Cosmic Express

by Jack Williamson

*More and all around when we are at our radio or television! Paul Draper and company, clean and sleek, zipping over the Solar System blinding away at racing radios, cleaning up competitive and generally never missing a word or doing other wild-type appearance! Jack Williamson is the body who's got to suffer his own punishment for a role—the profession of science fiction writer. The hero of this tale is an author of interplanetary adventure sagas. It certainly shows a fine personal appreciation of drama for such an author to speak directly as truly as Jack Williamson does here.*

**M**R. ERIC STOKES-HARDING tumbled out of the rumpled bed-clothing, a unkempt slender figure in purple-striped pajamas. He padded fondly across to the other of the twin beds, where Noddy, his pretty blonde, lay quiet beneath light silk covers. With a groan, he stood up and began a series of limber, bending exercises. But after a few half-hearted movements, he gave it up, and walked through an open door into a small bright room, its walls covered with book cases and also with scientific appliances that would have been strange to the man of four or five centuries before, when the Age of Aviation was but beginning.

Twining, Mr. Eric Stokes-Harding stood before the great open window, stretching. Below him was a wide, park-like space, green with excaid lawns, and bright with flowering plants. Two hundred yards across it rose an immense pyramid building—an ornate structure, gleaming with white marble and bright metal, striped with the verdure of terraced soft-gardens, its slender peak rising to help support the gray, undribbed glass roof above. Beyond, the park stretched away in illustrious vista, broken with the graceful colonnaded buildings that held up the great glass roof.

Above the glass, over this New York of 2432 A. D., a freezing blizzard was sweeping. The small picture was that of the slightly clad man at the window, who was inhaling deeply the fragrant air from the plants below—an hour, winter and summer, exactly at 20° C.

With another groan, Mr. Eric Stokes-Harding turned back to the room, which was bright with the rich golden light that poured in from the suspended globe of the cold starlight that illuminated the snow-covered

city. With a distressed grimace, he seated himself before a broad, paper-littered desk, sat a few minutes leaning back, with his hands clasped behind his head. At last he straightened reluctantly, slid a small typewriter out of its drawer, and began pecking at it impatiently.

For Mr. Eric Stokes-Harding was an author. There was a whole shelf of his books on the wall, in bright jackets, red and blue and green, that brought a thrill of pleasure to the young novelist's heart when he looked up from his clattering machine.

He wrote "thrilling action romances," as his enthusiastic publishers and television doctors said, "of ages past, when men were men. Red-blooded heroes responding vigorously to the stirring jostles of primitive life!"

He was impelled in to the rooms of his library—provided they were distant enough from modern civilization. His hero was likely to be an Apache robbing through the jungle, with a bloody tomahawk in one hand and a beautiful girl in the other. Or a cowboy, "hard riding, hard chasing," the wandering hero of the ancient cowboys. Or a man marooned with a lovely woman on a desert South Sea island. His heroes were invariably strong, fearless, resourceful fellows, who could handle a club on equal terms with a cuse man, or call science to aid them in fending off a benighted tribe from the terror of a desolate wilderness.

And a hundred millions read Eric's novels, and watched the dramatization of them on the television screen. They thrilled at the simple, magnetic lives his heroes led, paid him handsome royalties, and subconsciously shared his opinion that civilization had taken all the best from the life of men.

Eric had settled down to the ardent satisfaction of describing the sensuous delight of his hero in the roasted marrow bones of a dead mammoth, when the pretty woman in the other room screamed, and presently came tripping into the study, gay and vivacious, and—in her husband of a few months most judiciously thought— altogether beautiful in a bright silk dressing gown.

Reluctantly, he clattered the machine back into its place, and resolved to forget that his best "red-blooded action thriller" was due in the publisher's office at the end of the month. He sprang up to kiss his wife, held her embraced for a long happy moment. And then they went hand in hand, to the side of the room and pushed a series of buttons on a panel—a simple way of ordering breakfast sent up the automatic shaft from the kitchen below.

Nada Stokes-Harding was also an author. She wrote poems—"back to nature itself"—simple lyrics of the sea, of sunsets, of bird songs, of bright flowers and warm winds, of thrilling communion with Nature, and growing things. Men read her poems and called her a genius. Even though the whole world had grown up into a city, the birds were extinct, there were no wild flowers, and no one had time to bother about sunsets.

"Eric, darling," she said, "isn't it terrible to be cooped up here in this little flat, away from the things we both love?"

"Yes, dear. Civilization has ruined the world. If we could only have lived a thousand years ago, when life was simple and extend, when man

burned and killed their meat, instead of drinking synthetic stuff, when men still had the joys of conflict, instead of living under glass, like hot house flowers."

"If we could only go somewhere——"

"There isn't anywhere to go. I write about the West, Africa, South Sea islands. But they were all filled up two hundred years ago. Pleasure resorts, universities, cities, factories."

"If we only lived on Venus! I was listening to a lecture on the television, last night. The speaker said that the Planet Venus is younger than the Earth, that it has not cooled so much. It has a thick cloudy atmosphere, and low, easy forests. There's ample, elemental life there—like Earth had before civilization ruined it."

"Yes, Kingsley, with his new infrared ray telescope, that penetrates the cloud layers of the planet, proved that Venus rotates in about the same period as Earth; and it must be much like Earth was a million years ago.

"Eric, I wonder if we could go there! It would be so thrilling to begin life like the characters in your stories, to get away from this hateful civilization, and live natural lives. Maybe a rocket——"

The young author's eyes were glowing. He skipped across the floor, seized Nada, kissed her ecstatically. "Splendid! Think of running in the virgin forest, and bringing the game home to you! But I'm afraid there is no way. —Want The Cosmic Express?"

"The Cosmic Express?"

"A new invention. Just perfected a few weeks ago, I understand. By Ludwig Von der Valla, the German physicist."

"I've quit bothering about science. It has ruined nature, filled the world with silly, artificial people, doing silly, artificial things."

"But this is quite remarkable, dear. A new way to travel—by ether!"

"By ether!"

"Yes. You know of course that energy and matter are interchangeable terms, both are simply atomic vibrations, of different sorts."

"Of course. That's elementary." She smiled proudly. "I can give you examples, even of the change. This disintegration of the radium atoms, making helium and lead and energy. And Millikan's old proof that his Cosmic Ray is generated when particles of electricity are united to form an atom."

"Eric! I thought you said you weren't a scientist?" He glowed with pride. "But the method, in the new Cosmic Express is simply to convert the matter to be carried into power, send it out in a radiant beam and focus the beam to convert it back into atoms at the destination."

"But the amount of energy must be terrific——"

"It is. You know the short waves carry more energy than long ones. The Express Ray is an electromagnetic vibration of frequency far higher than that of even the Cosmic ray, and correspondingly more powerful and more penetrating."

The girl frowned, running dimples fingers through golden-brown hair.

"But I don't see how they get any recognizable object, not even how they get the radiation turned back into matter?"

"The beam is focused, just like the light that passes through a camera lens. The photographic lens, using light rays, picks up a picture and reproduces it again on the plate—just the same as the Express Ray picks up an object and sets it down as the other side of the world."

"An analogy from television might help. You know that by means of the scanning disc, the picture is transformed into mere rapid fluctuations in the brightness of a beam of light. In a parallel manner, the focal plane of the Express Ray moves slowly through the object, progressively, disclosing layers of the thickness of a single atom, which are accurately reproduced at the other focus of the instrument—which might be in Venus."

"But the analogy of the lens is the better of the two. For no scanning instrument is required, as in television. The object is built up of an infinite series of plane layers, at the focus of the ray, no matter where that may be. Such a thing would be impossible with radio apparatus, because even with the best beam transmitter, all but a tiny fraction of the power is lost, and power is required to rebuild the atoms. Do you understand, dear?"

"Not altogether. But I should worry! Here comes breakfast. Let me barge over first."

A bell had rung at the shaft. She ran to it, and returned with a great silver tray, laden with dainty dishes, which she set on a little side table. They sat down opposite each other, and ate, getting as much satisfaction from contemplation of each other's faces as from the excellent food. When they had finished, she carried the tray to the shaft, slid it in a slot, and reached a button—thus disposing of the culinary cares of the morning.

She ran back to Eric, who was once more sitting dolefully at his typewriter.

"Oh, darling! I'm thrilled to death about the Cosmic Express! If we could go to Venus, to a new life on a new world, and get away from all this hateful conventional society—"

"We can go to their office—it's only five minutes! The chap that operates the machine for the company is a pal of mine. He's not supposed to take passengers except between the offices they have scattered about the world. But I know his weak point—"

Eric laughed, fumbled with a hidden spring under his desk. A small polished object, gleaming silver, slid down into his hand.

"Old friendship, plus this, would make him—like spinach."

The minutes later Mr. Eric Stokes Harding and his pretty wife were in street clothes, light silk tunics of loose, flowing lines—style clothing being required in the artificially warmed city. They entered an elevator and stopped thirty stories to the ground floor of the gym building.

There they entered a cylindrical car, with roofs of snow down the sides. Not greatly different from an ancient subway car, except that it was airtight, and was hauled by magnetic attraction and repulsion through a

were exhausted of air, at a speed that would have made an old railway track gap with amazement.

In five more minutes their car had whipped up to the base of another building, in the business section, where there was no room for parks between the mighty structures that held the unbroken glass roofs two hundred stories above the concrete pavement.

An elevator brought them up a hundred and fifty stories. Eric led Nada down a long, carpeted corridor in a wide glass door, which bore the words:

#### COSMOPOLITAN EXPRESS

enclosed in gold capitals across it.

As they approached, a lean man, carrying a black bag, dashed out of an elevator shaft opposite the door, ran across the corridor, and cried. They pushed on after him.

They were in a little room, cut in two by a high brass grill. In front of it was a long bench against the wall, that reminded one of the waiting rooms in an old railroad depot. In the grill was a little window, with a lazy, brown-eyed youth leaning on the shelf behind it. Beyond him was a great, glowing pile of machinery, half hidden by the brass. A little door gave access to the machine from the space before the grill.

The thin man in black, whom Eric now recognized as a prominent French heart specialist, was dancing before the window, waving his bag frantically, staring at the sleepy boy.

"Quack! I have tell you not truth! I have see most urgent necessity to go quickly. A patient I have in Paris, not yes in an most critical condition!"

"I hold your horses just a minute, Master. We got a train in the machine now. Russian diplomat from Mexico to Rio de Janeiro. . . . Two hundred seventy dollars and eight cents, please. . . . Your train now! Keep cool, you'll be there before you know it! Remember this is just an experimental service. Regular installations all over the world in a year. . . . Ready now. Come on in."

The youth took the money, pressed a button. The door sprang open in the grill, and the frantic physician leaped through it.

"Lie down on the crystal, lie up," the young man ordered. "Hands at your sides, don't breathe. Ready?"

He manipulated his dials and switches, and pressed another button.

"Why, hello, Eric, old man!" he cried. "That's the lady you were telling me about? Congratulations!" A bell jangled before him on the panel. "Just a minute. I've got a call."

He punched the board again. Both bells lit and glowed for a second. The youth turned toward the bell hidden somehow, spoke crossly.

"All right, madam. Walk out. I hope you found the train pleasant."

"But my Violet! My precious Violet!" a shrill female voice came from the machine. "Sir, what have you done with my darling, Violet?"

"I'm sure I don't know, madam. You lost it off your hat!"

"None of your impertinence, sir! I want my dog!"

"Ah, a dog. Must have jumped off the crystal. You can have him sent on for three hundred and——"

"Young man, if any harm comes to my Violet—I'll—I'll—I'll appeal to the Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Animals!"

"Very good, madam. We appreciate your patronage."

The door flew open again. A very fat woman, puffing angrily, face highly colored, clothing shimmering with artificial gems, waddled pantomimically out of the door through which the frantic French doctor had so recently vanished. She rolled heavily across the room, and out into the corridor. Shriek words flared back:

"I'm going to see my lawyer! My precious Violet—"

The sallow youth worked. "And now what can I do for you, Eric?"

"We want to go to Venus, if that ray of yours can get us there."

"To Venus? Impossible. My orders are to use the express merely between the various designated stations, at New York, San Francisco, Tokyo, London."

"See here, Charley," with a cautious glance toward the door, Eric held up the silver flask. "For old time's sake, and for this—"

The boy seemed dazed at sight of the bright flask. Then, with a single swift motion, he snatched it out of Eric's hand, and bent to conceal it below his instrument panel.

"Sane, old boy. I'd send you to heaven for this. If you'd give me the micrometer readings to set the ray with. But I tell you, this is dangerous. I've got a sort of television attachment, for focusing the ray. I can turn that on Venus—I've been scanning myself, watching the life there, already. Terrible place. Strange. I can pick a place on high land to set you down. But I can't be responsible for what happens afterward."

"Simple, primitive life is what we're looking for. And now what do I owe you?"

"Oh, that's all right, between friends. Provided that stuff's genuine! Walk in and lie down on the crystal block. Think at your ease. Don't move."

The little door had swung open again, and Eric led Nedra through. They stepped into a little cell, completely surrounded with mirrors and suit prisms and lenses and electron tubes. In the center was a slab of transparent crystal, eight feet square and two inches thick, with an intricate mass of machinery below it.

Eric helped Nedra to a place on the crystal, lay down at her side.

"I think the Express Ray is focused just at the surface of the crystal, from below," he said. "It dissipates our vibration, to be transmitted by the beam. It would look as if we were walking into the crystal."

"Ready," called the youth. "Think I've got a fair you. Sort of a high island in the jungle. Nothing bad in sight now. But, I say—how're you coming back? I haven't got time to watch you."

"Go ahead. We aren't coming back."

"Gee! What is it? Elephant? I thought you were married already. Or is it business difficulties? The Bear did make an awful end last night. But you better let me set you down in Hong Kong."

A bell jangled. "So long," the youth called.

Nedra and Eric felt themselves enveloped in fire. Sheets of white flame seemed to leap up about them, leaping the crystal block. Suddenly there was a

sharp pricking sensation where they touched the polished surface. Then blackness, blackness.

The next thing they knew, the fire was gone from about them. They were lying at something extremely soft and fluid, and warm rain was beating in their faces. Eric sat up, found himself in a red paddle, beside him was Nada, opening her eyes and struggling up, her bright garments stained with black mud.

All about was a thick prickle, dark and glossy—and very wet. Palm-like, the gigantic trees rose, or fern-like, drooping clouds of feathered green foliage high against a wonder sky of unbroken gloom.

They stood up, triumphant.

"At last!" Nada cried. "We're free! Free of that hateful old civilization! We're back to Nature!"

"Yes, we're on our feet now, not parasites on the machines."

"It's wonderful to have a fire, strong man like you to trust in, Eric. You're just like one of the heroes in your books!"

"You're the perfect companion, Nada. . . . But now we must be practical. We must build a fire, find weapons, set up a shelter of some kind. I guess it will be night, pretty soon. And Charley said something about savage animals he had seen in the telecasts."

"We'll find a nice dry cave, and have a fire in front of the door, And skins of animals to sleep on. And pottery vessels to cook in. And you will find seeds and grow grain."

"But first we must find a flint bed. We need flint for tools, and to strike sparks to make a fire with. We will probably come across a chunk of virgin copper, too—it's found native."

Presently they set off through the jungle. The mud seemed to be very abundant, and of a most sticky consistency. They sank into it ankle deep at every step, and the traces of it clung to their feet. A mile they struggled on, without finding where a provident nature had left them even a single fragment of quartz, to say nothing of a mass of pure copper.

"A dismal share," Eric grumbled, "to come forty million miles, and meet such a reception as that!"

Nada stopped. "Eric," she said, "I'm tired. And I don't believe there's any rock here, anyway. You'll have to use wooden tools, sharpened in the fire."

"Probably you're right. This soil seemed to be of alluvial origin. Shouldn't be surprised if the native rock is some hundreds of feet underground. Your idea is better."

"You can make a fire by rubbing sticks together, can't you?"

"It can be done—easily enough, I'm sure. I've never tried it, myself. We'll use dry sticks, first."

They resumed the weary march, with a good friction of the new planet adhering to their feet. Rain was still falling from the dark, here and there a steady, warm downpour. Dry wood seemed scarce as the proverbial hen's teeth.

"You didn't bring any matches, dear?"

"Matched? Of course not! We're going back to Nature!"

"I hope we get a fire pretty soon."

"If dry wood were gold dust, we couldn't buy a hot dog."

"Eric, that reminds me that I'm hungry."

He continued to a few pings of his own. They turned their attention to looking for banana trees, and coconut palms, but they did not seem to abound in the Venezuelan jungle. Even small animals that might have been slain with a broken branch had contrary ideas about the matter.

At last, from sheer weariness, they stopped, and gathered branches to make a sloping shelter by a vast fallen tree trunk.

"This will keep out the rain—maybe—" Eric said hopefully. "And tomorrow, when it has quit raining—I'm sure we'll do better."

They crept in, as gloomy night fell without. They lay in each other's arms, the body warmth oddly comforting. Nada cried a little.

"Buck up," Eric advised her. "We're back to nature—where we've always wanted to be."

With the darkness, the temperature fell somewhat, and a high wind rose, whipping cold rain into the little shelter, and threatening to demolish it. Scores of mosquito-like insects, seemingly not unaccustomed in the least by the inclement elements, swarmed about them in clouds.

Then came a sound from the dimly starry night, a hoarse, bellowing roar, rumbling, terrifying.

Nada clung against Eric. "What is it, dear?" she chattered.

"Must be a mighty Dinosaur, or something of the sort. This world seems to be in about the same state as the earth when they flourished there. . . . But maybe a won't find us."

The roar was repeated, nearer. The earth trembled beneath a mighty tread.

"Eric," a thin voice trembled. "Don't you think—it might have been better— You know the old life was not so bad, after all."

"I was just thinking of our rooms, nice and warm and bright, with hot foods cooking up the shaft whenever we pushed the button, and the gay croaks in the park, and my old typewriter."

"Eric?"

"Yes, dear."

"Don't you wish—we had known better?"

"I do." If he winced at the "we" the girl did not notice.

The roaring outside was closer. And suddenly it was answered by another, louder, and considerably closer, roar, echoed strangely through the forest. The loud sounds were repeated, alternately. And always the more distant seemed nearer, until the two sounds were together.

And then an infernal din broke out in the darkness, Ballywry Screeches, Deafening shrieks. Mighty splashes, as if straggling Trolls had upset a cage, Thunderous crashes, as if they were demolishing forests.

Eric and Nada clung to each other, in doubt whether to stay or to fly through the storm. Gradually the sound of the conflict came nearer, until the earth shook beneath them, and they were afraid to move.

Suddenly the great fallen tree against which they had erected the flimsy

shelter was rolled back, evidently by a chance blow from the invisible monsters. The painful roll collapsed on the bedraggled bureau. Nada burst into tears.

"Oh, if only—if only—"

Suddenly flame lapped up about them, the same white fire they had seen as they lay on the crystal bleak. Dizziness, insensibility overcame them. A few moments later, they were lying on the transparent table in the Cosmic Express office, with all those great mirrors and prisms and lenses about them.

A bumbling, red-faced official appeared through the door in the grill, fairly babbling apologies.

"So sorry—an accident—inconceivable. I can't see how he got at! We got you back as soon as we could find a focus. I sincerely hope you haven't been injured."

"Why—what—what—"

"Why I happened in, found our operator drunk. I've no idea where he got the stuff. He mentioned something about Venus. I consulted the auto-register, and found two more passengers registered here than had been recorded at our other stations. I looked up the duplicate beam coordinates, and found that it had been set on Venus. I got them on the television at once, and we happened to find you."

"I can't imagine how it happened. I've had the fellow locked up, and the 'dry laws' are on the job. I hope you won't hold us for excessive damages."

"No, I ask nothing except that you don't press charges against the boy. I don't want him to suffer for it in any way. My wife and I will be perfectly satisfied to get back to our apartment."

"I don't wonder. You look like you've been through—I don't know what. But I'll have you there in five minutes. My private car—"

\* \* \* \*

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